DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 367 846 CE 065 911

AUTHOR Frank, Fiona; Hamilton, Mary
TITLE "Not Just a Number." The Role of Basic Skills Programmes in the Changing Workplace. An Account of a Leverhulme Trust Funded Research Project.
INSTITUTION Lancaster Univ. (England).
SPONS AGENCY Leverhulme Trust, London (England).
PUB DATE Jun 93
NOTE 207p.; A product of the Centre for the Study of Education and Training. For a related document, see CE 065 912.
AVAILABLE FROM CSET, the Center for the Study of Education and Training, Lancaster University, Lancaster LA1 4YL, England, United Kingdom (8.50 British pounds, plus 2 pounds postage and packing).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC09 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Basic Education; Adult Programs; *Basic Skills; Educational Attitudes; Educational Benefits; Educational Needs; *Educational Practices; Education Work Relationship; *Employer Attitudes; Foreign Countries; *Literacy Education; Models; Questionnaires; Surveys
IDENTIFIERS *England; *Workplace Literacy

ABSTRACT

A study examined current developments in workplace adult basic skills training (BST) programs for adults in northwestern England. Case studies of three area companies offering workplace BST programs were conducted along with a telephone survey of 56 local employers (of 200 originally contacted) to gauge their awareness of and attitudes toward workplace BST and their perceptions of their companies' need for such training. Most employers were not currently providing BST, and most were unaware of the few BST programs that do exist. Only 4-12% of those interviewed perceived BST as yielding specific benefits to employers and employees, whereas up to 44% cited various barriers to BST. The case studies revealed additional barriers. Recommendations for facilitating BST development included the following: publicizing the benefits of BST; encouraging universal access to BST; increasing coordination among/commitment from employers, training providers, and trade unions; ensuring confidentiality; creating favorable learning environments; developing appropriate curricula; providing opportunities for progression; and monitoring program quality. (Contains 115 references. Appended are national education attainment targets; a schedule of the case study interviews, visits, and consultations; aims and objectives of the work-based training needs analysis; and the employer survey instrument and related documents.) (MN)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

ED 367 846

# "NOT JUST A NUMBER":

# THE ROLE OF BASIC SKILLS PROGRAMMES IN THE CHANGING WORKPLACE

Fiona Frank
Mary Hamilton

## Centre for the Study of Education and Training

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

F Frank

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

LANCASTER UNIVERSITY

CE 068 911



BEST COPY AVAILABLE

# "NOT JUST A NUMBER"

# THE ROLE OF BASIC SKILLS PROGRAMMES

# IN THE CHANGING WORKPLACE

AN ACCOUNT OF A LEVERHULME TRUST FUNDED RESEARCH PROJECT

Fiona Frank and Mary Hamilton
CSET
(Centre for the Study of Education and Training)
Lancaster University
June 1993

**A CSET Working Paper, © CSET 1993 (This edition October 1993).**

Further copies of this report are available at a cost of £8.50 plus £2.00 p.&p., from

CSET, the Centre for the Study of Education and Training,
Lancaster University
Lancaster LA1 4YL

Tel 0524 592679
Fax 0524 844788

Also available from CSET:

"Not Just A Number: Writings about workplace learning". By workers in the North of England, edited by Fiona Frank with a foreword by Jane Mace. 52 pp, ISBN 0-901800-18-x. Price £3.50 inc. p. & p.

"Not Just A Number: The Video". Students from Sheffield, Lancashire & London speak about their workplace learning experiences. 40 minutes. £10 to hire, £40 to buy.

# About the Authors

**Fiona Frank** is the main researcher and author of this report. She is a graduate in European Studies at the University of Bath, and holds the Open University Professional Diploma in Post-Compulsory Education. She has been interested in access to further and higher education for all groups of people since her experience of working at a rehabilitation hostel in Oxford with former drug misusers, some of whom went back into the education system, sometimes at a very basic level, and ended up with degrees, professional qualifications, and secure employment. She has taught in prison education and worked with refugees and ex-offenders. She is further developing the ideas contained in this report in her continuing work at CSET, the Centre for the Study of Education and Training at Lancaster University.

**Mary Hamilton** is a Senior Research Fellow in the Department of Educational Research, Lancaster University. Her main areas of interest are in adult and continuing education: policy issues; comparative perspectives, especially across industrialised societies; processes of adult learning; and issues of access and transition for mature students. Her research focuses particularly on literacy and Adult Basic Education. She is a founder member of the national network, Research and Practice in Adult Literacy (RaPAL), and a core member of Lancaster University's Literacy Research Group. Her role as director of this project has mainly been that of providing guidance, encouragement and editorial advice.

Special Note: most of this report was typed on a 'Maltron' ergonomically designed keyboard. For more information about this keyboard, which can be of help in cases of repetitive strain injury (RSI) contact:

The RSI Association
Chapel House
152-156 High Street
Yiewsley
West Drayton
Middx.
UB7 2BD
Tel: 0895 431134

PCD Maltron Ltd
15 Orchard Lane
East Molesey
Surrey
KT8 0BN
Tel: 081 398 3265

# Acknowledgements

We would like to thank *Angela Leach* and *Sheena Horne* from the Centre for the Study of Education and Training (CSET) for their invaluable support during the life of the project. Other colleagues at Lancaster, particularly *Murray Saunders, Alison Fuller*, and *Sue Bergin* in CSET, and *Rachel Rimmershaw* in the Education Research Department, have helped us with particular problems or issues. *Ray Wilkins* of LAWTEC, (Lancashire Area West Training and Enterprise Council), has been a useful source of information and of funds, particularly in helping us to run events which involved bringing workplace learners together and to give their opinions a wider circulation.

Members of our Consultative Group have been a resource we would not have been able to do without, providing the project with information and links from different disciplines and different areas of work.

*Brenda Dyer* (Lancashire County Council); *Wendy Leach* (formerly Mid Cheshire College); *David Barton* (Lancaster University); *Stephanie Pordage* (Workbase Training); *Lyn Butler* (Baxi Heating); *Jim Rowley* (Baxi Heating, MSF); *Ray Wilkins* and *Chris Morton* (LAWTEC); *Pat McMellon* (Skelmersdale College); *Marie-Louise Sullivan* and *Pauline Riley* (Accrington College);

all attended meetings and contributed in a very valuable way to discussions about the work of the project.

*Rhiannedd Pratley* (ALBSU) and *Bill Campbell* (NUPE)

were unable to attend the meetings but commented on reports from the project.

Our links with other institutions and individuals have been a great source of stimulation and have renewed our energy and enthusiasm for the project at different times:

*Susan Hoddinott* (in Canada/Warwick University); *David Jolliffe* (at the University of Illinois at Chicago); *Sandra Macaskill*, (formerly of SCEC, Edinburgh); *Jane Mace*, (Goldsmiths College); *Catherine Macrae* (Lothian Region Community Education Department); *Marie Morrissey* (University College, Galway, Ireland); *John Payne* (at Leeds University 'Adult Learners at Work' project); and *Gill Ormond*, (currently at the Family Services Unit, London)

have all, knowingly or otherwise, kept the project going when work on it seemed hard or unrewarding.

*Chris O'Mahony* of Goldsmiths College, coordinated and played an important role in our residential weekends, from which the book and the video 'Not Just A Number' have come (for which we owe thanks for financial support from LAWTEC, and Lancaster University Staff Development Fund). We wouldn't have been able to run these events as successfully without the additional participation of *Graham Birkin* from Take Ten and *Clare Gillard* from Skelmersdale College; and *Brian Leighton* at Alston Hall made us all very welcome at our first residential weekend.

The students we have grown to know well - in particular those who attended one or both of the weekend meetings:

*Carol Allcock, Becky Bailey, Pauline Bailey, Brian Bentham, Brian Brooker, Suzanne Brooker, Jennifer Cussens, Brenda Cutforth, Yvonne Davies, Pat Goodman, Annice Harrison, Jean Hewitt, Jackie Holden, Richard Kedward, Sharon Kimpton, Stephanie Kirkland, Ivy Marshall, Cornelius Scollen, Maria Smith, Neil Thompson, Malcolm Walker, Margaret Walsh, Alan Webb, Jean White* and *Ruby Wilson*;

have continued to inspire us. During the life of the project, we've seen the 'power of education' lead people forward to great things. Jennifer Cussens has moved on from her cleaning job to train as a residential social worker; Maria Smith - a cook in an alternative to custody centre when we first met her - is hoping to train as a Probation Officer. It's stories like these which lead us to continue to promote workplace learning for manual workers wherever we can.

We have had a lot of help in carrying out our work from the three main 'Case Study' companies; Baxi Heating, Bamber Bridge, Preston; BICC Helsby, Cheshire; and Richards & Appleby, Skelmersdale. It is worth remembering that all three companies are in business to make a profit, rather than to provide a service to research workers. However, each went out of their way to afford time and facilities to the fieldworker, making rooms available for interviews, providing teas and coffees on demand, and allowing the fieldworker to conduct a series of long (at least half-hour) interviews with members of the management, shop stewards, and shop floor workers. *Graham Bettany* and *Lyn Butler* at Baxi Heating Human Resources Department, *Helen Wright* the BICC Employment Development Officer, and *Ann Collins*, Personnel Officer at Richards & Appleby, acted as the main contact for the fieldwork and all played a proactive role, keeping the project in touch with developments and making our job easier.

*Pat McMellon*, the Skelmersdale College ALBSU Project worker, was unfailingly helpful, keeping us in touch with developments and arranging interviews with tutors, etc. *Pauline Ruth* from Mid Cheshire College sent us a lot of useful information, and put us in touch with other relevant people. *Sue Nieduszynska* at Runshaw College also played an essential part in keeping us informed of developments at Baxi, and we had a lot of help from Baxi Shop Stewards *Ronnie Bootle* (AEEU) and particularly *Jim Rowley* (MSF), who also served on the consultative group and the fundraising committee for 'Not Just A Number'.

*Stephanie Pordage*, Workbase Training Consultant, in addition to serving on the consultative group, made herself available to us throughout the project with information and advice. She also gave presentations at our Dissemination Seminars about the work of the Workbase consultancy.

We owe thanks, of course, to all the North Western employers who gave up their time to speak to us in the telephone survey.

We renew our thanks to all those people who helped us formulate our ideas in the first phase of the project:

*Meriel Lobley* (Lancaster & Morecambe Adult College), *Alistair Tranter* (Cheshire County Council), *John Cummins* (Lancashire County Council), *Liz Smith* (Education Officer, North

West TUC), *Steve Bond* and *Cathy Burke* (Take Ten, Sheffield), *Liz Saunders* and *Chris Johnston* (HMP Garth), *Sandra Southee* (Ford EDAP programme), *Steve Longbottom* (Ruskin College), *Dawn Walker* (Beneast Training), and *Margaret Levy* (Work Based Learning Project): and also to those people involved in the 'secondary cases' not mentioned so far: *Sue Willmer* of Fleetwood Funeral Home; and *John Nolan* from Brooke Bond Oxo, and to *Jeannie Heatherly* of Jefferson County Public Schools' Worksite Education Project, Kentucky.

Fiona's daughter *Anna* probably deserves an acknowledgement: the report would have come out several months earlier if it hadn't been for her arrival and her continuing to make her presence felt at various hours of the day and night for the next eighteen months, but she has been a source of joy if not always inspiration for at least one of the writers. Also, the maternity leave her arrival engendered gave the project a useful five month break which led to very interesting 'follow-up' data collection.

The photographs were taken by *Chrissie Gladwin, Mary Hamilton* and *Barbara Madoc*.

We are indebted to the Leverhulme Trust for financing this project.

Although many people have helped us with this report, the final responsibility for what has been produced rests, of course, with us.

We hope this project is just the start of something, rather than the type of project which has a beginning, a middle and an end, the results of which sit on people's shelves gathering dust.

Fiona Frank, Mary Hamilton
Lancaster, June 1993

# Preface

During the two and a half years in which we have been working on this research, we have gained a good overview of what is going on in the world of workplace basic skills training schemes in the UK.

A related development, the introduction of general education programmes in the workplace, has received a good deal of publicity. These programmes have been initiated by large manufacturing concerns, including Ford, Rover and Lucas. These employers can see many spin-offs in promoting their programmes: for example Ford management reported improved industrial relations, good publicity for the company, and an interest among potential recruits in participating in 'EDAP', the Employee Development Assistance Programme.

By comparison, the recent development of workplace basic education is much less well-known. Although there are more and more examples of colleges and training providers working with companies to provide various models of basic skills training, most of the respondents in our survey of employers in the North West had not heard of any of these.

The Case Studies we describe in this report offer some examples of this kind of training going on in the North West of England during the life of our project.

A section in the case study reports called 'What's In A Name' gives a long list of different course titles that have been used by companies to avoid the words 'basic skills' or 'literacy and numeracy': The Open Learning Centre; The Career Group; Brush Up Your English; and so on. If this is "Training that dare not speak its name", perhaps at the workplace as well as elsewhere in education, Basic Skills training is still "The Poor Cousin" of the education world, and we hope that this report and its accompanying publications will go some way to changing this situation.

The Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit's current 'Basic Skills at Work' initiative has put in place a number of new workplace basic skills training development projects around the country. It will be interesting to see if the work that those projects set up within companies can be sustained, or if the companies simply take advantage of the free training package on offer and then drop the scheme as soon as external support is removed and they have to bear the costs themselves.

During the life of the project we have spoken to students who have taken up the learning opportunities on offer, and among that group there is no doubt about the personal benefits which they are gaining from the learning: they display a great enthusiasm and a keenness for this kind of learning scheme to be supported and to continue. If they have any complaint about their learning schemes, it is only if they have been too short. We have produced a booklet and a video of these students' words, because we feel that their evaluation of workplace basic skills training deserves a wider audience.

This report sets out the context and background in which the current workplace basic skills training schemes are operating. The future is wide open: colleges and trainers need the money and want to promote links with companies; companies need a more flexible workforce; but the recession is making all training decisions more difficult, and private and public sector companies

alike are cutting costs and watching their 'bottom lines'. Can Workplace Basic Skills come through? It depends, we feel, on the philosophy and ethos of the companies in which it is taking place, and particularly whether they have a real commitment to developing a learning culture in their organizations. Most crucial of all is the vision of those in industry and government who are taking the main decisions about policy and funding, and whether they are capable of taking the long view of benefits to be gained.

# Contents


About the Authors iii

Acknowledgements v

Preface ix

What are Basic Skills? xiii

To the Reader xiv

**Part One: The Background** 1

1. Introduction: the Background and the Context 3
2. The UK Scene 13
3. Actors and influences on workplace basic skills schemes: A Model. 23

**Part Two: The Cases** 31

4. Introduction to the Cases 33
5. Richards & Appleby: an ALBSU project in Skelmersdale 37
6. BICC Helsby: Workbase and Local Colleges 51
7. Baxi Heating: 'F.A.M.E.' in Bamber Bridge, Preston 67
8. Other models of workplace basic skills (and other) provision 91

**Part Three: Employers** 99

9. Introduction: the literature, other surveys, methodology and aims of our survey 101

10. Employers' awareness of and attitudes to workplace basic skills training: The Survey Results: 113

**Part Four: Synthesis** 135

11. Benefits and Blocks - benefits of and blocks to setting up workplace basic skills training schemes, and problems faced by those schemes which do exist. 137

12. Issues: issues around workplace basic skills which need to be addressed 155

13. Recommendations 173

14. Endnote 177

**Bibliography** 179

**Annexes** 187

1. National Education Attainment Targets 187

2. Schedule of interviews, visits and documentation consulted for Case Studies 188

3. Aims and Objectives of the Workbase Training Needs Analysis 192

4. Employer Survey: Interview schedule 193

5. Employer Survey: Introductory letter 195

6. Employer Survey: Questionnaire 196

## What are 'Basic Skills?'

The Basic Skills that this report discusses include English - speaking, reading and writing; Maths; and basic 'computer literacy'. In the workplace, these skills are needed in such basic tasks as calculating overtime and drawing cash out of a bank account (since most companies these days have gone over to cashless pay). They are fundamental in gaining access to further training and to career development. They underpin participation in company decision-making; and the most basic of working tasks include elements of basic skills such as reading labels, counting units, measuring parts and writing reports, however brief.

# To the Reader:

This report is laid out in the normal way, with the introductory section at the beginning, followed by a report of our Case Studies, then our Employer Survey, and concludes with a 'synthesis' of the issues we feel have come out of the research, and some recommendations for the management of Workplace Basic Skills schemes.

You may like to turn straight to the recommendations, which are on page 173, if you want to find out 'where we're at'. You may be more interested in reading about the Case Studies - the detail of what happened during the life of the basic skills schemes running in seven companies in the North West. The Introduction to this section is Chapter Four which starts on page 33, and the cases themselves start on page 37. If you are interested in our findings and those of other surveys about employers' attitudes to workplace basic skills training schemes, the introduction to that section of the report is Chapter Nine, starting on page 101, and the findings of our survey are in Chapter Ten, which starts on page 113.

There is a chapter dealing with what our respondents in the survey and the case studies see as the main benefits of workplace basic skills training, and the main blocks to or problems of putting on such schemes: Chapter Eleven on Page 137.

If you are interested in what other writers have said about the general issues coming out of this work, as well as what we think, these are discussed in Chapter Twelve, 'Issues', on page 155.

If, however, you want to read about the general background and context of workplace basic skills schemes, and about current and historic movements in workplace and other basic education and training, and think about the influences on the different 'actors' involved in workplace basic skills training schemes, you should start at the beginning with Chapters One, Two and Three; (The Background and the Context, The UK Scene, and Actors and Influences on Workplace Basic Skills Schemes: A Model.)

We would be very interested in your comments on any part of this report.

Fiona Frank & Mary Hamilton
CSET
Cartmel College
Lancaster University
Lancaster LA1 4YL

# Part One:

# The Background

# Chapter One

## Introduction: The Background and the Context

This report documents the recent history of an innovation in workplace learning - basic communications skills programmes for non-supervisory staff. It reports on a research project, funded by the Leverhulme Trust, which has investigated current practice and employers' attitudes to Workplace Basic Skills programmes, in the North West of England.

## Section One: Background to the Project

The aims of the project, as originally set out to the Leverhulme Trust, were to investigate current developments in workplace schemes for adult basic skills training; to explore the attitudes of employers and others towards these developments; and to identify the conditions under which successful models may be implemented.

In order to achieve these aims, we planned to conduct the research in three main parts:

1. A study of the *general development* of workplace basic skills training in the North West, in the UK, and internationally.

2. Three *case studies*, of companies in the North West where workplace basic skills training schemes were going on during the life of the project.

3. A *telephone survey of North Western employers*, to gauge their awareness of and attitudes to workplace basic skills training, and their perceptions of the need for such training within their own company.

Our intention from the start has been that there should be practical outcomes from the project, in raising awareness of the issues among employers and trade unions and encouraging the spread of information about these initiatives. This report is, therefore, just one of the outcomes of this project. Further reports and papers are planned including one on international developments in workplace basic skills programmes and an accessible summary report aimed at employers. A book of student writing about the experience of workplace learning and a video on the same theme have already been published.

## Methodology

**Part One: General Development**

We were able to draw on networks and contacts we had in the ABE field to help us with this part of the project. We reviewed the literature in the areas of:

- workplace basic skills development in the UK, North America and Australia, and to a limited extent in Europe
- changing management styles including human resource management
- adult education policy and practice
- training policy and rights to paid educational leave
- the history of worker education and training

We sent questionnaires to contacts we had made throughout Europe to ask for information about existing legislation and practice in their different countries. We contacted Industrial Training Boards to ask about their training and practice in basic skills. We kept in contact with national organizations working in the field, such as ALBSU (the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit) and Workbase Training. We collected information from Trades Unions, and spoke to local trade union officers.

**Part Two: The Case Studies**

We arranged access to three companies where schemes were taking place, through the Steering Groups of the three schemes. We conducted individual interviews with students, shop floor workers who were not students, managers, team leaders, supervisors, Shop Stewards and college tutors. We arranged some group discussions, with students and with tutors, and also spoke to some senior managers in the relevant Local Education Authorities (Lancashire and Cheshire). We obtained copies of relevant reports, correspondence and publicity materials relating to the case studies.

To complement these cases we visited four other sites where different types of employer-sponsored communications skills courses were going on.

In addition we brought together a group of the students from some of these sites to two residential weekend events, where they were encouraged to talk and write about their work and their shared learning experiences. These weekends led to the publication of a booklet "Not Just a Number" (Frank, 1992) which was featured in the Guardian Education Supplement of 3rd November 1992, and has been bought by TECs and ABE departments country-wide. In addition a video, also called "Not Just A Number", was launched in Adult Learners week, and includes management, union and college views as well as students talking. Both are celebrations of workplace learning.

**Part Three: The Employer Survey**

We devised and piloted an interview schedule, and used this to conduct telephone interviews with employers in the North West of England. We complemented this telephone survey with a written questionnaire sent to a second group of employers.

## Timetabling

The work of the project fell into four main *phases*:

Phase One: January - March 1991. Information-gathering, networking, setting up links, obtaining access.

Phase Two: April - July 1991. Data collection.

Phase Three: January - July 1992. Follow-up data collection.

Phase Four: August 1992 - October 1992. Analysis.

Phase Five: November 1992 - June 1993. Writing-up.

## Layout of the Report

This report is arranged in four sections, which reflect the structure of the project itself.

**Part One: Introduction:**

In this first part, we explain what workplace basic skills training programmes are. We provide a background and context to this kind of training, looking at the history of workplace literacy schemes in the UK, the background to the changing culture within organizations - the introduction of 'quality circles', for example - which means that more workers within organizations need to use core communications skills; and we examine current policy and practice in the UK within adult basic education in general, and workplace basic skills in particular. We examine a model we are developing for looking at decision-making within workplace basic skills schemes, and we briefly look at the situation in other parts of the world.

**Part Two: The Cases**

In the second part, we provide detailed accounts of three workplace basic education schemes which were going on in three manufacturing companies in the North West of England during the first and second phases of our research: Baxi Heating, Preston; Richards & Appleby, Skelmersdale; and BICC, Helsby, Cheshire. As well as detailing how the three schemes were set up, managed, financed and run, and including a timetable of the life of each scheme, we include

the voices of students, managers, tutors and shop stewards talking about their initial expectations of the schemes, and the benefits which have been gained from the schemes, as well as some of the problems which arose.

In addition, in this part, we include a shorter section looking at four different education schemes, running on differing lines, in different types of organization; a large city council, a small Funeral Home, a Category B Prison and an education-for-redundancy scheme in a manufacturing company.

**Part Three: Employers**

In the third part, we look at the results of the survey of employers in the North West which we carried out to find out whether the need for basic skills among their manual workers had changed over time, how aware they were of workplace basic skills schemes, and how favourable they would be to their implementation within their own companies.

**Part Four: Synthesis**

In the fourth part, we attempt to draw the whole together. We deal firstly with the *benefits* of setting up workplace basic skills training, the *blocks* to setting up such programmes and possible solutions to these, drawing on the Cases and the Employer Survey. Secondly we look at some *Issues* which have come up during our research which we feel deserve a closer examination. Next, we list ten *Recommendations*, directed to employers, training providers, unions and policy-makers, which we feel need to be taken into account if the many new workplace basic skills schemes being set up within the ambit of the government-funded Basic Skills At Work scheme, and others, are to operate successfully. And finally, we discuss some conclusions we have come to from doing this project, and list areas for future work - both planned and hoped for, both research and development work - within the area of workplace basic skills schemes.

## Section Two: Context of the Development of Workplace Basic Skills Programmes

In documenting the development of workplace basic skills programmes, we focus on *change* at many levels: from the detail of designing and carrying out new learning programmes, to changes of organization and attitudes in workplaces and changes of a more global kind - in the economic context of work, the appreciation of the role and value of training and lifelong education and strategies for supporting them.

In this report, these changes are tracked mainly through local examples of particular programmes studied in-depth and the attitudes of employers in one region of the U.K. However, a concern to understand and place these developments in their larger historical, economic and educational context has run throughout the project. The aim of this section is to outline some of the strands of thinking which we have found helpful in understanding the development of workplace basic skills programmes.

**What are workplace basic skills programmes?**

* Workplace Basic Skills programmes cover the range of foundation communication skills essential for participation in further training, and increasingly demanded of manual and service workers on the job. These include reading, writing, calculating and measurement, and involve metrication, computer literacy, oral communication and presentation skills. The content of these courses can be more or less related to specific jobs and can have both vocational and personal development outcomes. As an area of training and education, basic skills are interesting precisely because of this since programmes can emphasise these outcomes to different extents.

* The target groups for these programmes are usually non-supervisory staff, both manual and service workers, and attendance on the courses is voluntary.

* These courses are one variant of the more general adult basic education and related 'access' courses that have developed in the U.K. only over the last 20 years or so. In developing basic skills programmes in the workplace, providers draw on and adapt the traditions and insights gained from this movement.

* Courses can take place wholly or partly in work-time, and usually take place at the work site.

* Courses are sponsored by companies, sometimes with additional funding from public agencies.

**Equal Opportunities and Rights to Training**

From this description of the focus of workplace basic skills programmes it is clear that they are aimed at groups within the workforce for whom training opportunities have not traditionally been available: unskilled workers, many of whom are part-time, or in temporary or insecure employment. Women and ethnic minority groups are over-represented in these marginalised groups. It is not just the novelty of the content of these courses that makes them an important innovation, therefore, but the idea that such workers should be included in the training programme of companies at all, and, especially important, be allowed time to follow this training within their working hours. In these respects, workplace basic skills programmes challenge deeply entrenched attitudes and practices in the workplace and can have a great deal to do with promoting equal opportunities.

Research shows how the distribution of training opportunities and paid educational leave has always favoured skilled and professional workers, white males and full-time workers (see Killeen & Bird, 1981; Mace & Yarnitt, 1987; Miliband, 1990).

The development of these programmes also fits in with a long tradition of trade union activity which seeks a framework for ensuring the rights of workers to training and educational opportunities. This tradition can be traced back to the nineteenth century and its effects can be

seen in legislation concerning rights to paid educational leave and Trade Union Education programmes. This movement has been more or less powerful, active and mainstream in different countries, and the resulting framework of rights is correspondingly more or less robust (see Simon, 1992; Miliband, 1990; Mace & Yarnitt, 1987).

**Learning for Work and Learning for Life**

Since basic skills occupy a position which crosses the vocational/personal divide, issues about life-long learning become relevant (see Molyneux et al 1988; Payne et al, forthcoming).

Outside of the workplace, lifelong learning has been encouraged as part of the demand to make education more flexible, enable people to take different pathways through education at all levels and to return to learning at different points of their life. The access movement (Fulton, 1989) is a reflection of this concern.

Encouraged by demographic changes that put existing adult workers at more of a premium and technological changes that require constant updating of skills, the idea of a 'learning workforce' has mirrored this more general concern with lifelong learning (see, for example NIACE, 1991; Pedler, Burgoyne et al, 1991). Focusing on learning as a process that happens intermittently over the lifespan raises a number of fundamental questions about the best division of resources between initial schooling and later adult education and training, the value of experiential learning and ways of accrediting experience (Evans, 1992). Life long learning is unwieldy and sporadic and demands different responses from educators, trainers and policy makers than does a neat system of initial schooling and examination.

**The flexible worker: global changes in workplace organization, training and education**

The strands described above are cut across by some other, very powerful trends that have their origins in current economic conditions and systems.

The developments in basic skills programmes that we have been tracking are happening at a time of global economic realignment, with a world recession and key western industrial countries re-evaluating their economic performance in the light of the perceived success of their competitors in Europe, Japan and North America.

These more global changes are resulting in an emphasis on *new forms of workplace organization*, variously described as the 'flexible' organization, the 'learning' organization or the 'high performance' workplace. Key features in this, some of which are imported from Japanese management, some from new U.S. thinking, are:

* post-Fordism, the movement away from the mass production assembly line toward customised products and markets;

* changes in the division of labour - multi-skilling, work teams and the contract culture;

* total quality management and just-in-time methods of stock control

See Thompson (1990); Atkinson (NEDO, 1986); Braverman (1974); Pedler et al (1991), for discussion of these developments.

There is much current debate about these changes in company thinking and company practices. Wood (1989) quotes the work of Atkinson (op. cit.) and Kern & Schumann (1987) when he discusses the move away from Taylorist and Fordist ideas of assembly line working towards new 'flexible' workforces and the employment of a 'core' of flexible, trained workers and a 'periphery' of unskilled workers taken on on a casual, temporary or part-time basis as required.

*"'Work was viewed only from the perspective of control and regulation and the solution was the most restricted organization...one can imagine' (Kern & Schumann; op. cit. p154-5.) Now ...there is an increasing realization of the qualitative significance of human work performance [ibid p 160]; a growing recognition of the problems created by highly restrictive work organisations and the limits they may place on productivity growth; as well as an acknowledgement of the demands the new technologies make for more skilled and integrated workforces."*

(Wood, op. cit. p 12)

These problems, increasingly identified with Taylorist principles, include absenteeism, low morale and low motivation among the workforce.

The practice of using core and periphery workers has a direct effect on workplace training and basic skills programmes in particular: firms are unlikely to train workers whom they employ on a temporary or part-time basis. Thus there may be a situation of a well-trained core of workers, and a much larger group of workers with no access to any training, only taken on to fulfil low-level work on short-term contracts.

If the workplace of the future is seen as a flexible, learning organization, then it follows that the worker of the future is the *flexible, learning worker*. The new emphasis is therefore on the economic value of training and education to shape such workers, both in terms of equipping them with transferable skills and in terms of socialising them into the new working practices required of them, such as team working, frequent change and adaptation to new technologies.

Training is only one of the methods used to shape the flexible workforce of the future: such developments go hand in hand with changing industrial relations: breaking down traditional occupational divisions, and new deals on job conditions and pay structures, which are often achieved through redundancies and sub-contracting. These moves toward 'flexibility' have therefore resulted in an erosion of trade union power and of the rights and working conditions of many workers which has not been balanced by any legislation to ensure the rights of access to training.

In the UK, for example, Helen Rainbird of the Industrial Relations Research Unit at Warwick University, explains the threat to trade unions posed by moves towards multi-skilling and flexibility very clearly in her recent book on union perspectives on training and industrial restructuring (Rainbird 1990):

*"Although the multi-skilling poses a threat to an individual worker's skills through the possibility that it will lead to de-skilling, it also poses a threat to collective identity, by undermining the distinctive occupational basis of the different trade and craft unions. Though the development of multi-skilled workers on greenfield sites poses no direct threat to existing union organisation on that site, since the workforce is a tabula rasa as far as inter-union relations are concerned, it nevertheless poses an indirect threat insofar as companies in the same economic sector are in competition with each other and must also take advantage of productivity gains from the introduction of multi-skilling. Where companies are introducing multi-skilling it is often accompanied by single-site or single-union*

*agreements, which themselves cause problems for inter-union relations where sites are unionised. In other instances some trade and craft unions have lost negotiating rights even if they have not lost representational rights. Where formerly distinct jobs are combined, it poses problems of a different order. For example, if there are redundancies which categories of workers will be made redundant? When skills are combined, which categories of worker will show the greatest aptitude for acquiring the new skills and have preference for retraining? Which of the existing skills is most essential to the new production methods? Which are the most appropriate trade unions to represent the future workforce if some lose negotiating rights? Competition for members can increase conflicts between trade unions and opportunism, combined with a willingness to accept no-strike deals, increases divisions within the trade union movement as a whole. ..... Ideally, trade unions need to respond by acting together, by reaching agreement on spheres of influence and by amalgamation."*

(Rainbird, op cit)

**Workplace Basic Skills: who benefits?**

All these changes in the conditions of working life are important to bear in mind as we focus in this report on the single aspect of workplace basic skills programmes. What looks at first glance to be an uncomplicated extension of training opportunities and benefits, takes on a more problematic guise when seen in the wider context we have described above.

Elsewhere, in Payne, et al (in preparation), we argue that a moment of opportunity has occurred for basic skills training in the coincidence of the 'lifelong learning' agenda of the equal opportunities lobby and the 'flexible worker' agenda of progressive management. However, inherent in this situation is a potential conflict of interests and aims for basic skills which we would expect to surface in different ways in different companies and programmes, changing over time according to the interplay of broader forces on the economic scene: 'Equal opportunity' and 'individual deficit' theories of literacy do not sit easily alongside one another.

In other countries too the balance between these strands may be different and we would expect that the balance in any one country will affect the longer-term future possibilities for Workplace Basic Skills programmes.

The US, Canada and Australia have all over the last few years introduced national initiatives which have supported the development of basic skills programmes, backed up in various ways with legislation and funding. In Australia the impetus has come from the formulation of a national Language Policy and basic skills programmes take place in the context of the Training Guarantee, a levy system for employers. In the US a federal funding initiative and legislation about adult education (the National Literacy Act of 1991, amending the Adult Education Acts, including changes in the national Workplace Literacy Programme) has authorised a large release of funds with a strong emphasis on workplace basic education and awareness raising among employers. (U.S. Dept. of Education, 1992). In Canada, a five year federal initiative has released funds which have boosted workplace basic skills programmes, though this has not developed any longer term infrastructure for supporting these developments (see Johnston, 1991).

Western European countries vary considerably in their provisions for Paid Educational Leave but many introduced legislation in response to the ILO Convention of 1974 (see, for example, Labour Research Dept, 1990 which compares countries on rights to leave for trade union and health and safety representatives; Miliband, 1990; Mace & Yarnitt, 1987 which includes a chapter on Italy's '150 hours' programme).

At the European Community level there is an interest in comparing experiences in this area and encouraging developments. In general, however, it has been outside the scope of this project to gain more than a superficial view of the situation in many countries. We hope to gain further funding to explore this in collaboration with colleagues working in basic skills programmes outside the UK, using the international contacts we have made during the course of this research.

# Chapter Two

## The UK Scene

---

The concept of Adult Basic Education (ABE) as now understood and used in Workplace Basic Skills programmes has only existed in the U.K. since the Literacy Campaign of the 1970s (see Hamilton, 1992). But the provision of literacy and other education for workers did not start in the 1970s. There is a much longer history in Britain of adult education for the working classes, provided by their employers, by other interested groups, and by the working classes themselves.

In the next two sections, we briefly review this historical legacy and look at developments this century, including the arrival of adult basic education as a distinct form of adult education in the U.K. Then we go on to look at the wider context within which workplace basic skills programmes are currently being introduced to companies in the U.K. Finally, we introduce a framework for understanding the actors and influences that determine the shape of the programmes described in later chapters.

## Section One: Worker Education in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

An early example of a 'workplace literacy scheme' is that established in 1696 by Sir John Clerk, a landowner of Penicuik, who

> *"was certain that education and godliness would make his workers more docile and industrious"*

and therefore provided a scheme for his workers where:

> *"... Anyone under sixty years of age 'who is willing and desirous to learn to read the Scriptures' would be paid for by the coal-owner Clerk, a reward of 20 marks Scots going to 'each person who shall learn to read distinctlie'."*
>
> (Duckham, 1970, quoted in Houston, 1985)

Many schemes were set up during the next three centuries, with differing motivations, expectations, and curricula, which aimed to improve the education of the 'working man' [sic]. Kelly (1983) details examples of parsons and educated women setting up schools to teach workers to read the scriptures. One such scheme was that set up by Hannah and Martha More, two sisters in Somerset, who established

> *"Day and evening schools, amid the poor miners, industrial workers and farm labourers"*
>
> (Kelly, ibid)

where reading (but no writing) was taught.

> *"My object has not been to teach dogmas and opinions, but to form the lower classes to habits of industry and virtue".*
>
> (Hannah More, quoted in Kelly, ibid)

Houston (1985) feels that the motivation of factory owners to involve themselves increasingly in education in the nineteenth century was concerned with 'social control': he feels that it was not the actual skills of reading and/or writing acquired in learning which would be of use to the employer, but that

> *"... properly applied, education could help to discipline a workforce, traditionally used to irregular rounds of mainly agricultural tasks, to the continuous and strictly regulated work demanded by industrial capitalism."*
>
> (Houston, ibid, p 220/221)

and that schooling, in childhood, could have the effect of 'increasing productivity':

> *"... a less direct but potentially effective strategy for increasing labour productivity was to use schooling as a means to accustom people in youth to boring toil."*
>
> (ibid, p 221)

Not all commentators agree with Houston's view of education as being for 'social control'. Stephens (1987) for example, argues that the increasing supply of education by the 'better off classes' for the working classes in part, at least, reflected a growing demand.

**Education for the furtherance of society**

The kinds of schemes set up in the mid 19th and early 20th century by educated people to impart what could be seen as their own learning and culture to the working classes, (sometimes recruiting working men to do the imparting), aimed to advance the individual within existing society. These are reviewed by Johnson (1983), Mansbridge (1920), and Tylecote (1957) and include schemes such as The Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, The People's College and The Working Men's College; The Mechanics Institutes and Mutual Improvement Societies. University Extension was also set up in the 1850s: there was a sense within the universities of

> *"a mission to working people, who were for the greater part cut off from opportunities of acquiring knowledge."*
>
> (Mansbridge, ibid)

The Workers Education Association (WEA) which still operates today, was set up in 1903 for similar ends (Mansbridge, 1920).

**Education for emancipation**

Schemes formed *by* as well as *for* the working classes had very different aims. They were concerned to understand and address inequalities in existing society, and saw the purpose of adult education as emancipation for working people. For example, the Corresponding Societies of the late eighteenth century were set up, according to Webb (1955):

> *"To enlighten the people - to show the people the reason, the ground of all their complaints and sufferings: when a man works hard for 13 and 14 hours a day, the week through, and is not able to maintain his family - that is what I understand of it: to show the people the ground of this: why they were not able."*
>
> (Webb, op. cit.)

Following on from the Corresponding Societies, the Chartist movement of 1837-1848 and the Owenite Socialist movement of around the same time founded their own educational institutions, and planned alternative systems: they *"saw education as the principle means of agitation"* for social and economic change (Johnson 1983).

These movements were the forerunners of Ruskin College, the Plebs League and The National Labour College Movement (1908-1964), which was established to assure the education of the workers from the working class point of view which would equip them for effective struggle for the abolition of capitalism. There was an understanding of the eventual goal as being the 'control of the working class by the working class' and the 'revaluation of culture' in a working class mode:

> *"the working class ... will add to a 'culture' not merely a new 'note' of its own, but will eventually revalue all culture by the standards of its own ideals and purposes."*
>
> (Horrobin, quoted in Millar, 1979)

The struggle between these different definitions of worker education is a recurrent theme up to the present day (see Simon, 1992). In the next sections, and throughout the report which follows, we see the current dichotomy within workplace education: between education for the benefit of the employer and education to benefit the worker. John Payne expresses the potential conflict clearly (in an article in preparation), when he states:

> *"The significance of human resource management is that it takes the legitimate claims of workers to education, training and development, and re-arranges them to match the interests of capital, rather than in the interest of individuals or in the collective interest of labour."*
>
> (Payne et al, forthcoming)

## Section Two: Education and Training for Adults in the Twentieth Century

In this section we talk about the recent history leading to the current situation, drawing training and adult education together. All the initiatives for working people discussed above were built on the assumption that adult education was an activity carried on outside of work, in peoples' 'leisure' time. They proceeded without any systematic involvement or support from central government or from industry. As Ainley & Corney (1990) point out, whilst governments initiated major reforms of the initial education system during this period, the training and education of adults attracted almost no public attention or funding, until the wartime periods of the early and mid twentieth century.

There was a laissez-faire attitude to training. It was left to industry to organize, and it relied on the craft-based apprenticeship system as the main mechanism for producing skilled workers. The Trade Union movement did successfully negotiate Paid Educational Leave for Trade Union Education courses for their shop stewards during this period (Mace & Yarnitt, 1987; Simon 1992) and formulated broader statements about the need for paid leave. The TUC was also active in its support for adult residential colleges like Ruskin and Northern College, which offered access routes to higher education for working class adults.

Rising unemployment eventually became a stimulus to government action on training. Under a conservative government in 1964 the Industrial Training Act established the first ever Central Training Council and Industrial Training Boards (ITBs) for each industrial sector to oversee training policy for their constituency. The ITBs were empowered to levy employers and use the funds to pay for college and company training schemes. Training activity in industries covered by the ITBs rose significantly during the later 1960s (Ainsley & Corney, 1990) but companies, particularly smaller businesses, complained about the levy system and the bureaucracy and interference of the ITBs. By 1973 a new Employment and Training Act was passed, and a large-scale exemption scheme was introduced. Five years on, Martin Yarnit (Mace & Yarnit, 1987) was able to quote Maureen Woodhall (Woodhall, 1980) as saying

> *"In 1977-78, the potential income from the levy amounted to £200 million, but the actual levies received were reduced through exemption to only £81 million".*

As the recession bit, and central government looked to a different approach to training policy, the ITB levy system faded. The 1973 Act signalled the beginning of a new era of training policy, central to which was the newly created Manpower Services Commission (MSC). The MSC was intended as a national agency with responsibility for both training policy for those in employment and job creation and training for unemployed people.

It was at this moment that an Adult Literacy campaign was launched in the U.K. It was launched following pressure from community workers in the voluntary sector. A national network of provision of adult basic education was set up with support from television and radio broadcasting and with a great deal of volunteer involvement. £1 million of central government funding was released for this, and provision was built on existing liberal adult education centres in local areas and voluntary community projects.

Over the next decade or so, with support particularly from strong local education authorities (notably ILEA, the Inner London Education Authority) and from a central agency, The Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit (ALBSU) it developed into a lively, eclectic and innovatory form of adult education. Without any system of entitlement for Adult Basic Education students, however, and because of ABE's location in the marginal adult and community education sector, funding was always scarce and unpredictable.

Literacy and numeracy were defined very broadly and the ethos of the liberal adult education approach was paramount. Vocational aspects of ABE were addressed by some programmes, particularly where funding was available from the Manpower Services Commission (MSC) for unemployed students. Links were also made with the more formal Further Education Colleges, as colleges began to see their role as providing access routes for adult students, not just as providers of education for school-leavers. ESOL in the workplace was developed through the Industrial Language Training Units (see Roberts et al 1992).

With the increasing pressures toward vocational relevance experienced by all parts of the education system, however, ABE has gradually been changing shape. Its fortunes have closely followed upheavals in the wider education and training scene. Increasingly, public funding for ABE (and for adult education more generally) has to be justified in terms of vocational relevance and has to fit into frameworks of accredition that are recognised by industry.

When it was originally created in 1973, the Manpower Services Commission had the support of government, employers and the Trade Unions. However, with successive governments and recessionary crises, the idea of a central training agency has been through several reincarnations, increasingly coming to be seen as a mechanism for managing mass unemployment. The great bulk of funding has been concentrated on unemployed school leavers and adults. Because of this, the impact on adult workers in employment, especially unskilled, women, and part-time workers, who are traditionally less likely to take part in training, has been minimal, despite a rhetorical commitment to equal opportunities.

The most recent reincarnation of the MSC, the Training, Enterprise and Employment Directorate (TEED) is a much reduced organisation, since funding is now devolved to employer-led local Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) and Local Enterprise Councils (LECs) in Scotland, which encourage privatised training. These semi-autonomous groupings are now the main instruments of government training policy. Where vocationally oriented courses are concerned they liaise with further education colleges. They are struggling to maintain commitments such as the Youth Training scheme on a reduced budget, while delivering messages of strong encouragement to employers to commit resources to training, and particularly to accrediting their workers through a competency-based system of National Vocational Qualifications. This is encouraged by a new procedure known as 'output related funding', whereby a certain proportion of funding for courses is only passed on to the training organization once an agreed percentage of the participants have gained accreditation. (Unemployment Unit, 1993). This can cause problems, such as some students being put in for courses beneath their ability, to ensure that sufficient numbers pass; and some students who do not wish to take part in the accreditation process being excluded from the courses entirely. In addition some students may not be accepted on a course if it is suspected that they will not complete it or reach the level required.

**The Present Situation**

The historical legacy described above has shaped the current context within which workplace basic skills programmes are taking place in the U.K. together with some of the more global changes desribed earlier. What follows is a summary of the current scene dealt with under three headings: the economy, unemployment and the shape of the labour force; changing organisation of the workplace; and government policy on training and on adult and continuing education.

*Economy, unemployment, and the shape of the labour force.*

International comparisons show the U.K. to have a worse training record and lower educational achievement than its major competitors in Europe, North America and Japan (see for example figures published by the National Training Task Force 1992; Miliband, 1990). In part this is the result of an education system which concentrates on high level achievement of an elite group but has paid little attention to the educational or training needs of the population and workforce as a whole. In part it is the result of a lack of a strong policy direction from central government which has left training to individual employers and not prioritised a 'learning culture'.

The recession has deepened during the course of this project, with official unemployment figures rising sharply to over 3 million and continuing redundancies (Unemployment Unit, Working Brief, April 1993).

The types of employment open to people are changing with the disappearance of manufacturing and primary sector jobs, more part-time and temporary work. These changes, reinforced by deliberate government policy and legislation, have resulted in less trade union power and poorer conditions of work with more insecurity for many workers.

Demographic changes have also focussed attention on adult workers with fewer young entrants to the workforce.

*Changing organization of the workplace*

The introduction of new technologies, international influences from transnational companies such as Ford, Japanese motor companies and the European Community are resulting in new ways of working. These include the changes in management practices, quality standards and industrial relations broadly outlined above.

New technologies require a familiarity with computers and keyboards. Metrication is still an issue, with younger people coming into industry with no knowledge of the imperial system still in use while older people are having to adapt to the metric system. New ways of working in teams and Japanese-style quality circles require verbal and written communications skills from manual workers who may have only been used to working on assembly lines and who are now expected to chair and minute meetings, to make presentations to other teams, and to prepare reports.

New quality standards (BS5750 and ISO9000) are increasingly being demanded of their subcontractors by large companies. They remove the necessity for the company to make checks

on the quality of the goods they have ordered, by increasing the role of internal inspection. They mean, in the words of one of our respondents, that "*each worker is his own quality inspector*". A company applying for BS5750 has to document every procedure involved in its work, including the process of passing goods and services within and between internal departments. This means an initial process of describing how each process works, and an ongoing system of checking that each process is being complied with correctly at all times. All of this demands much greater basic skills at all levels within the company.

Where companies seek to satisfy the requirements of new standards (such as Training 2000 in the Health Service and Investors in People (IIP), being monitored by Training & Enterprise Councils), more reading, writing and maths tasks are involved at all levels throughout any organization.

New legislation on health and safety, such as the new COSHH (Control of Substances Hazardous to Health) regulations and Food Hygiene certification imposed by the European Community, demands that individual workers understand and comply with the safety aspects of their work. This brings more demands for basic skills.

These changing practices may lead to company/management demand for training. In practice, such changes are patchy, with some industries adapting more readily. There is still resistance to change and lack of resources to support change, particularly amongst older established businesses. Correspondingly there are a range of views about the need for training. Evidence for this from recent surveys (Atkinson & Papworth, 1991; IMS, 1993, and our own survey outlined herein) is offered below in Chapter Nine: Introduction to the Employer Survey.

Even when management can see the need for training, different groups of workers are affected unevenly, depending on their status within the workforce. A contract culture (part of the agenda of the flexible workforce) is now very widespread - coinciding with an enthusiastic government agenda of privatisation of services. Organizations

> *"segment their workforces more, having a core workforce which is multi-skilled and functionally flexible, and a peripheral workforce which is more disposable with fewer employment rights, facilitated through such practices as temporary employment, short-term contracts and part-time working."*
>
> (Wood, 1989).

Some periphery workers, taken on casually or part-time by a main contractor, may be in a different position, being 'core' workers of another organization which exists to supply casual labour. An example of this is cleaners at Lothian Regional Council. Formerly full-time council workers who worked as, say, cooks or cleaners in an individual school or council residential establishment, they are now employed by a contracting company which 'busses' cooks and cleaners around the Lothian region to fill needs as they arise. In this case, the employing organization undertakes the training required by its staff. In other cases, workers may be taken on directly as peripheral workers by a main organization as and when they are required, and particularly in times of high unemployment when there is a large labour force to choose from these workers would not be likely to be trained on-site.

*Government Policy on Training and on adult and continuing education*

*a) Training Policy.*

As Mace and Yarnitt (1987) point out:

> *"In Britain, public spending on education and training for adults is so arranged that the gap which yawns between two school-leavers, one without qualifications and the other who goes on to full-time study, grows wider and deeper as they grow older."*

As we have seen above, there is rhetoric from government but little financial commitment to ensuring upgraded training opportunities for those already in work. Most public money, available now through the TECs has gone into training programmes for unemployed school leavers and adults.

There is still no long-term strategy or legislative framework for upgrading adult training for those in employment. All initiatives, such as National Vocational Qualifications, 'Investors in People', and the new National Education and Training Targets (see Annex 1) require voluntary participation from employers. Little is offered by way of financial incentives.

However, there have been far-reaching reforms of the formal education system with an emphasis on accountability and vocational relevance. This has included encouragement to wider access in further and higher education but with emphasis on cost-recovery and on measurable outcomes. Local Education Authorities now have much less power to co-ordinate local policy since funding for Further Education comes directly from central government to individual colleges and other training bodies. Colleges bid in competition with one another for targetted funding.

*b) Workers' Rights to education/training*

The U.K. in the 1990s sees a weakened Trade Union movement as a result of high unemployment, the loss of many members as the traditional manufacturing industries have collapsed, and industrial relations legislation introduced during the Thatcher years. In concentrating on redundancy and related issues for their members Trade Unions have few resources left to make active demands for training or basic skills programmes.

Their major achievement, the establishment of rights to Paid Education Leave (PEL) for Trade Union representatives for Trade Union Education, is being eroded to cover an ever narrowing range of activities (see Labour Research Department, 1988; McIlroy, 1992) along with other curtailments of Trade Union power.

However, there are some important residues of earlier activities, reflecting co-operative and public service philosophies and beliefs in workers' rights to education and training. These include Sheffield City Council's 'Take Ten' programme (described below in Chapter 8); and Workbase, the consultancy originated by the National Union of Public Employees (NUPE) which provides an influential model of participative planning for workplace communications skills training in both the public and the private sector. Baxi Heating, one of our Case Study companies

(described below in Chapter 7), has a co-operative partnership ethic behind it. There are a number of statements and discussion papers about paid educational leave that suggest strategies for the U.K. (see for example, TUC, 1989; Miliband, 1990; NATFHE, 1991; MSF, 1987; Society of Industrial Tutors, 1988, and Mace & Yarnitt, 1987.) The Transport and General Workers' Union, for example, cites five 'rights for training' to which it is committed, which include

> *"a right to broad-based training beyond the specific and immediate requirements of employers and which offers more than just the competences required to carry out the specific tasks of a job."*
> (T&GWU, 1991).

Unlike other European countries, the U.K. has never acted upon its ratification of the International Labour Organization's 1974 Convention on Paid Education Leave. However, other European countries have introduced PEL, and there is now pressure from the European Community via its Social Charter for such rights to be extended (Miliband, 1990).

*c) Adult and Continuing Education.* There is little financial support currently for lifelong learning. What there is is justified by its economic and vocational relevance. However, there are many examples of innovative practice and structures outside of the the workplace that have developed from the Adult Basic Education movement and the access movement (through Open College Federations, for example, whose accreditation systems have been drawn on, at least in this geographic area, in workplace learning groups).

The National Institute for Adult and Continuing Education (NIACE) lobbies actively for the needs of adult learners, both in and out of the workplace. It has published a number of discussion papers focussing particularly on the needs of disadvantaged groups. In a recent report from a working group chaired by Sir Christopher Ball (NIACE, 1991), it promoted Employee Development programmes such as that of the Ford Motor Company and Lucas Aerospace as models of what companies can contribute to adult learning opportunities.

ABE as an active area of work with adults has matured since the early 1970's, developing its own traditions and philosophy, with a degree of national support and coherence provided by the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit (ALBSU). ALBSU has only a small budget but is active and strategic. For example, it has co-hosted several high-profile seminars, together with the CBI and the TUC, on the importance of workplace basic skills training.

Adult Basic Education itself has developed a model of practice which is student-centred, community-based and informal and as mentioned above, is now adapting to fit in with the demands of employers for workplace programmes. But it has been radically affected in the 1990s by cuts in local authority budgets imposed by greater central control over local authority spending. More recently, ABE has been incorporated into the more formal Further Education sector, as a result of the Further and Higher Education Reform Act. For the first time, ABE is a statutory form of provision though funded within strict parameters. FE colleges, with some private training organizations, will therefore be the major providers of Workplace Basic Skills programmes, with guidance and special funding from ALBSU via its 'Basic Skills at Work' initiative (described in the next section). Vocationally related ABE is also funded by the

Department of Employment through the Adult and Youth Training programmes for unemployed people.

*Conclusions*

In summary, workplace basic skills programmes are currently generally left up to employers to initiate, with some 'pump priming' money available via ALBSU and the TECs. There are a few good examples, supported by sympathetic management with input from the trades unions on site. Many of these schemes have taken place in the public sector where there is a committment to equal opportunities. However, more recently, with compulsory competitive tendering and an increasing emphasis on the 'internal customer' within the public sector, costs have had to be shaved wherever possible; less workers are expected to do more work in less time; and public sector schemes are being cut or having to change their focus. For example, in Sheffield, less council workers are allowed the ten days educational leave which the 'Take Ten' course requires. Meanwhile, it is in the private sector where new workplace basic skills training programmes are being set up, though it is not certain whether all of these schemes will have the same emphasis on development of the individual and their long term future is by no means secure.

Even in Government departments, less training for individuals' personal benefit will be taking place. A report, commissioned by the Government from the independent consultants Price Waterhouse, looked into ways of 'streamlining' the Arts Council. (Guardian, 5.6.93 p.10, and Observer, 6.6.93). Several ways of carrying out this 'streamlining' were mentioned, but relevant to this report is that the consultants singled out for comment a secretary, who "*was to take French tuition when there was no obvious benefit to her department*" (our emphasis). The report has been 'accepted positively' by the Government and so it seems we will have a situation where although the Government is encouraging employers to run employee development schemes through ALBSU and other organizations, and even 'pump-priming' in some areas to help these schemes to run, it may well not be prepared to tolerate them closer to home.

In the next chapter, we attempt to develop a model for examining these various influences on the decision-making around workplace basic skills programmes.

# Chapter Three

## Actors and Influences on Workplace Basic Skills Schemes: A Model

Just as there were many influences, actors, motivations and outcomes involved in the settings of the history of worker education in the UK, there are many actors and influences which have an impact on the workplace basic skills training of today as outlined above

**Actors**

The diagram Fig 3.1 on page 29 shows, in the deepest shaded sections, eleven main actors we have identified as playing a part in the decision-making around workplace basic skills training:

a) *National education institutions*; eg the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit (ALBSU) and the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE)

b) *Training and Enterprise Councils* (TECS)

c) *Local Education Authorities* (LEAs)

d) *Colleges*

e) *Tutors*

f) *Other trainers*

g) *Industrial Training Organizations*

h) *Management*

i) *Human Resources departments*

j) *'Workbase Training'*

k) *Other workplace skills development consultancies*

l) *Unions*, and

m) *Workers*

**Global Influences**

Each of these actors is situated in a changing world, and global changes, and global factors, affect them. The 'outer circle' of the diagram shows some of these 'global factors' which influence the 'actors' we are looking at in this section.

These 'global influences' have been referred to above in Chapters 1 and 2:

- the world economic situation
- the history of worker education
- industrial relations background
- new technology
- increasing use of communications skills
- the history and models of workplace training worldwide.

**Influences**

Each actor plays a part in other domains in addition to that of workplace basic skills training. The lighter shaded area adjacent to each 'actor' puts forwards some of the influences from these other domains which will affect how they operate in relation to each other, and in relation to the training schemes.

a) *The national adult education agencies, for example ALBSU (the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit)* and *NIACE (the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education)* are influenced in different ways.

*ALBSU* has received funding from the Education and Employment departments in order to run the 1991-1994 Basic Skills At Work programme, which seeks to set up innovative workplace basic skills schemes around England and Wales, with TECs and LEAs working in partnership. The way in which it in its turn influences policy-making in workplace basic skills schemes is affected by the 'flavour' of its source of funding and the strings attached to this funding, which it then has to attach when passing the funding on to training providers.

In addition, ALBSU brings together a wide range of Adult Basic Education practitioners, who are traditionally trained with a 'student-centred' ethos, and college and centre managers, currently coming to terms with changing emphases and looking at 'numbers' and 'budget-heads' as well as 'output-related funding' (described in the previous section).

*NIACE*, the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, is the 'National federal organization that represents the interests of everyone concerned with adult learning' (Tuckett, 1991). It functions as an awareness raising and advisory body. It is influenced by its membership, made up of researchers and practitioners in the world of adult and community education. It holds

regular conferences on issues of importance in Adult Education, at which it attracts speakers of high repute within the Adult Education field. It publishes policy discussion documents and sponsors research into adult continuing education-related topics. It in its turn aims to influence policy-makers and training providers: a 1991 Policy Discussion Paper, "Towards a Learning Workforce" (Tuckett, 1991) takes up a call made by Miliband in his paper 'Learning by right: an entitlement to paid education and training' (Miliband, 1990). This NIACE paper called for, among other changes;

> *"the adoption of a legislative entitlement for all adults between 16 and 65 to paid learning for 30 hours a year, supplemented by a right to 30 hours a year unpaid study leave. Legislation would need to be backed by cash-limited government funding, to supplement employers' existing and expanded training budgets, and by clear priorities for access to funding if demand exceeds budget. Individuals could store up unused entitlements for a number of years."*
>
> (Tuckett, op cit, p.6)

b) *Training and Enterprise Councils* are influenced by their local board members, made up mainly of representatives from local employers, with a small Trade Union representation. They receive some Government backing for particular projects, and have to compete with other TECs for some funding, including the ALBSU managed 'Basic Skills at Work' scheme funding. Their five year business plan, based on local factors at the time of writing, influences their actions during its life. They adminster the Investors in People scheme and fund some training within workplaces, though a large majority of their funds go to paying for training for those not in employment. They have to report on targets reached and most TECs are paying for at least some training on an 'output-related funding' basis: this has its effect on how it in its turn can help workplace basic skills training schemes.

c) *Local Education Authorities* have financial and political considerations to take into account on how they spend their money, being influenced by central government as well as the local electors. The educational considerations which they must take into account if they are to do their statutory duties in providing for children and those in higher education sometimes seem to be lost when looking at how they approach discretionary duties towards adults. The legislative changes which have taken Further Education out of their control from 1st April 1993 have meant that they cannot make much impact on workplace basic skills schemes, being responsible only for the Adult Colleges and not the Further Education Colleges which may be the providers of basic skills classes in their areas.

d) *Colleges* are also influenced by the legislative changes based around incorporation, and have been responsible for their own budgets from 1st April 1993. In basic skills, new ratios less favourable to students seem to be being brought in to meet new cost-cutting exercises; increasingly, full-cost fees are being charged to industry; there is a pressure to sell tailor-made and 'off-the-peg' courses to industry in addition to any links made with basic skills schemes. Although they employ tutors who may well, as mentioned below in Section (e), have a very strong sense of 'student-centredness', and the 'student as client', it seems that in the current climate, to the college working with an employer on a workplace basic skills scheme, the *employer* and not the student is the 'client'. (For a fuller discussion of this issue, see Robb, M 1992).

*e) Tutors*, as well as running sessions in workplace basic education schemes, may well work in community-based settings too, where there are different priorities placed, for example, on the content of the curriculum, and on the importance of 'outcomes' such as certification. They may well be on part-time, temporary contracts, and be keen to find permanent work. Their training may have aligned them with a 'student-as-client', 'client-centred' approach to basic skills training, and the shift towards 'employer-as-client' may not fit easily within their philosophy. The tutor role changes when they become assessors of competences for competence-based accreditation systems as well as traditional tutors.

f) *Other trainers*, who would mainly be working in private, profit-seeking training companies, are influenced by the need to recover their costs at source and find sources of profit in the training; and to link any basic skills training to other training provision the company may be able to offer. They are likely to be involved with the new standards such as TQM (total quality management), BS5750 (the British Standard on Quality) and to be seeking these standards themselves as well as possibly offering training in them.

g) *Industrial Training Organizations* have a declining role in the national training scene, since the phasing out of the national training levy. However, it is the lead Industrial Training Organization for each industry or sector which is formulating the requirements for the new National Vocational Qualifications at each level, and thus they have a part to play in the domain of workplace basic skills training. By establishing the competences involved in the NVQs at each level; what level of core communication skills each level will contain; and what format the testing will take, the Industrial Training Organizations, or Boards, determine what training in basic skills companies will have to provide for their workers before they are able to gain NVQs at each level. The new National Education Training Targets, suggesting that 50% of the employed workforce should be aiming for NVQs or credits towards them by 1996, implicate all industries, all sectors and all companies to look at these issues (see Annex 1).

h) *Management* within companies is primarily concerned with producing a product or providing a service, and making the organization profitable. The culture and ethos of the organization, and individual managers' training and background, will influence whether workplace basic skills training is seen by management as a factor which can contribute to the profitability of the company, or otherwise as a distraction which takes workers off the shop floor unnecessarily. Management may be concerned with new initiatives such as Total Quality Management, BS5750 and other quality standards, particularly inasmuch as they affect the number of other organizations which will trade with them. They are also regulated by law to take account of new COSHH (Control of substances hazardous to health) regulations. They will be aware of overall changes in the nature of work organization, towards a 'flexible workforce' and a 'core' and 'periphery' idea of employees (Atkinson & Meager, 1986). They will be concerned to relate any new training scheme to the overall business strategy within the company, and to the financial plans of the organisation. It is management who has the overview of the organisation, and should be able to see where core skills communications training would fit within the company.

i) *Human Resources Departments*, or personnel departments, are in their turn also influenced by the culture and ethos of the organization in which they are working, and by changing management styles. They are aware of local agreements with trades unions on pay and conditions which may include a training element. They will want to relate any new training to existing training within the company, and to the overall business strategy of the organization, and they will have training

budgets to work to or to 'fight for'. The level of support they receive within the company from other managers for any new scheme is also an important factor.

j) *'Workbase Training'*, set up originally by NUPE, the National Union of Public Employees, and now an independent, non-profit making consultancy working in the field of workplace basic skills training, is influenced by its history and background within the trade union movement, and by its ethos of worker participation in decision-making around training. It however needs to cover its costs, and when it is in receipt of grant funding, needs to respect its funders' demands.

k) Several *other workplace basic skills development organizations* have been set up particularly in the last couple of years as a response to the ALBSU Basic Skills At Work initiative, funded partly by Training and Enterprise Councils. They have in many cases been set up with a 'Workbase Training' philosophy, but, without being necessarily rooted in the Trade Union movement, they may be influenced to a greater extent by management demands on, for example, the curriculum, and power-sharing issues. Their funding is critical to this extent.

l) *Trade Unions* primarily have a duty to obtain the best conditions for their members. Training is included in this together with pay and other conditions, and trades unions will always be in favour of training schemes which increase opportunities for members. The Trades Union Congress has endorsed the government's National Education and Training Targets (as has the CBI); core communications skills are a fundamental part of this programme. The TUC regularly shares a platform with the CBI at events promoting workplace basic skills training schemes (for example, the September 1990 'Better Basic Skills - Better Work' ALBSU sponsored major event for employers, held at the CBI, with HRH the Princess Royal, John Banham, Director General, CBI, and Norman Willis, General Secretary, TUC). On the ground, local agreements on pay and conditions, and local industrial relations, will influence how local trades unions react to workplace basic skills training schemes: in 912 companies surveyed in a 1990 Labour Research Department survey, 31% of companies only informed unions about training decisions after they had been taken, and 22% did not inform them of training initiatives at all. (Labour Research Dept, 1990).

m) *Workers* are influenced by their own individual situations when it comes to taking part in workplace basic skills schemes. The threat of redundancy; their level of pay; the number of hours theywork and their shift patterns; and mortgage interest rates and rising cost of living, which might encourage individuals to see this kind of scheme as a distraction to the main activity of earning a living, are set against their interest in their work, promotion prospects and any changes there may be in the requirements of the current job. Outside influences include the communications skills required in activities outside work, such as family, children (at school and beyond) and hobbies. Other influences are to do with the individuals' attitudes towards education, their own experiences of school and of education in general, and the attitudes of others at work and around them, including their immediate supervisors, towards any return to learning on their part.

**Choices**

There are seven main areas where choices can be made around the way that workplace basic skills training operates: shown in the diagram in the lightest shaded area. These are:

- *Management*: how the programmes are managed
- *Who attends*: who makes the choices about which workers attend, and whether the programme is optional or compulsory
- *Finance*: who funds the programme and at what level the funding is committed for
- *Long-term/short-term*: whether the programme is designed simply to meet specific short-term goals, or is funded for a specific short-term period; or whether it can be extended and its goals enlarged upon over time.
- *Curriculum/style:* whether the curriculum and the style of the learning experience is student-centred and negotiated with the students, or whether it is pre-established by the management: or a mixture of the two.
- *Evaluation criteria:* what Performance Indicators have been established, and by whom, by which to evaluate the programme.
- *Release/timing*: Whether the sessions are timed to take place entirely, partly or not at all during work time; whether they are at an accessible time for all workers; and whether or not a 'release' arrangement has been made so that cover is provided for the absent student.

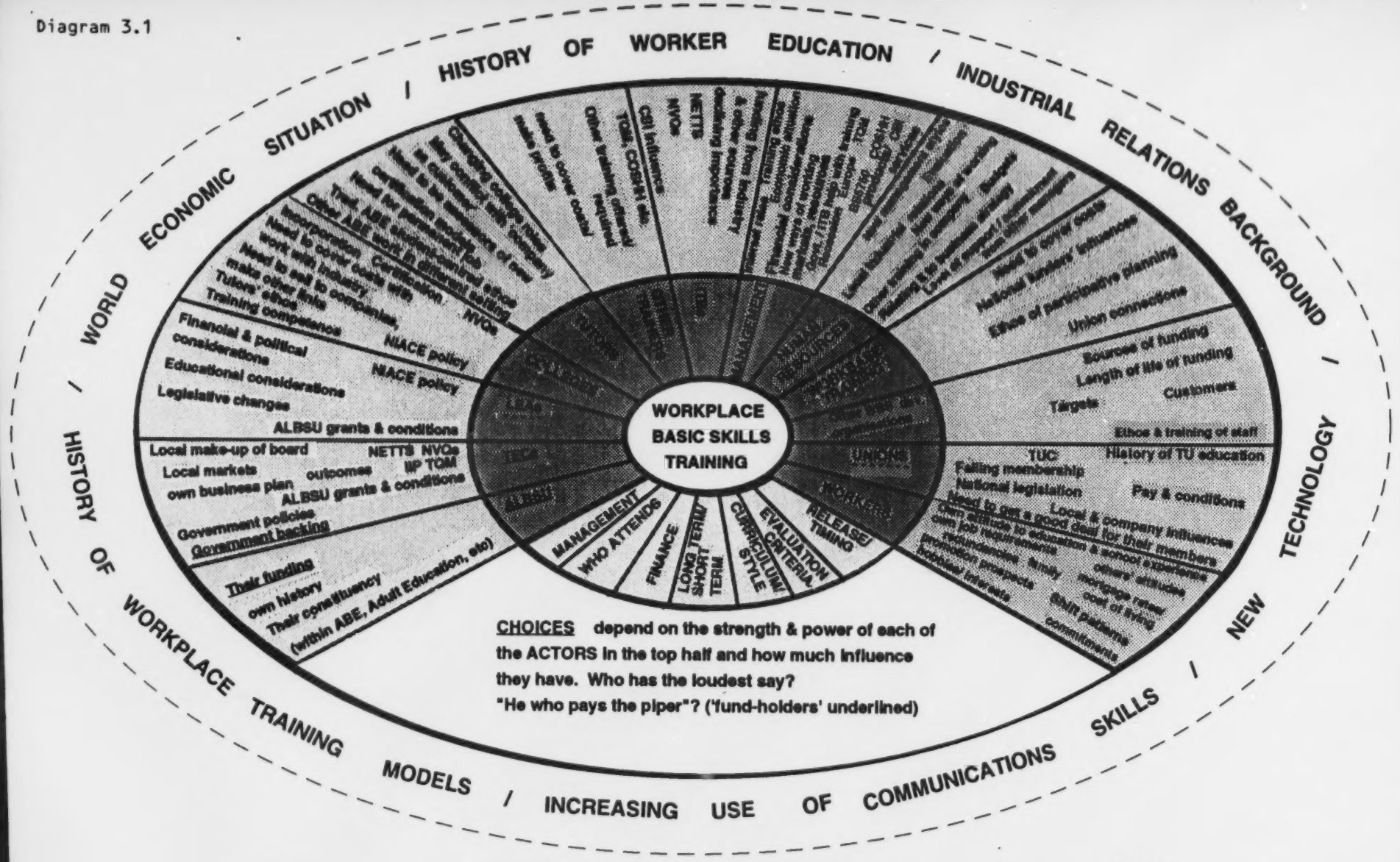
**Decision-making**

It seems to us that the issues around all these elements of choice depend on the strength, power, and relationship of the 'actors' in the network above. What is of particular importance is finance - those actors who are *budget-holders* and therefore have, we suggest, the loudest say, have been underlined in this, the final stage of the diagram.

Although we accept that there are always more elements which can be included in a model of this sort, the research described in the rest of this report has brought us to the conclusion that this is one way in which to represent the decision-making around workplace basic skills training in a relatively simple form, and on one sheet of paper!

In the next section, we examine seven different Workplace Education 'Cases'. Within these 'stories' the different influences on the decisions on how to run the schemes and for how long can be seen in practice.

Diagram 3.1


WORLD ECONOMIC SITUATION / HISTORY OF WORKER EDUCATION / INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS BACKGROUND / NEW TECHNOLOGY / SKILLS / COMMUNICATIONS / INCREASING USE OF / MODELS / TRAINING / WORKPLACE / OF / HISTORY
WORKPLACE BASIC SKILLS TRAINING
TUC
Falling membership
National legislation
Pay & conditions
Local & company influences
Need to get a good deal for their members
Own attitude to education & school experience
Others' attitudes
Mortgage rates
Cost of living
Shift patterns
Commitments
Own job requirements
Promotion prospects
Redundancies
Family
Hobbies/ interests
History of TU education
Ethos & training of staff
Customers
Targets
Length of life of funding
Sources of funding
Union connections
Ethos of participative planning
National workers' attendance
World of work/ Skills
Cost of training
Time
Cost of equipment
Cost of premises
Cost of staff
Cost of supply
Cost of training
Cost of staff
Cost of premises
Cost of equipment
Time
Cost of training
Cost of supply

# Part Two:

# The Cases

# Chapter Four

## Introduction to the Cases

The stories laid out in the next three chapters are of three Workplace Learning schemes, which were operating in the North West of England between January and July 1991, (at least). They were all sited in manufacturing companies, and they all involved cooperation between the company and a local further education college. All three schemes, though different in character, were set up following the "Workbase Training" model. Briefly, this involves participatory decision making at all stages of the planning of courses, involving unions and students as well as management. A confidential training needs analysis is carried out among the manual workers on site, and a steering committee is set up, made up of management, unions, college and students, which oversees the development and monitoring of the project.

In addition, Chapter Eight includes brief details of four other Workplace Learning schemes running along differing lines, which were taking place at the same time in four different settings - a learning support scheme for inmates taking vocational training classes at a Category B Prison, a Paid Educational Leave scheme run within a large City Council, an account of a small Funeral Home which sent one of its workers on Day Release for training in basic communications skills, and a manufacturing company, part of a multi-national corporation, running 'education for redundancy'.

Details of how we chose the three main cases are set out below.

Information about the three schemes was gathered mainly by conducting individual semi-structured interviews on site with management, middle management, shop stewards, shop floor workers from both student and non-student groups, and college staff involved with the three schemes. Other information comes from group discussions held with some of the student groups and tutor groups, telephone interviews, and documentation and correspondence made available to the fieldworker over the project's life. The Workbase Training consultant involved in two of the three schemes was also interviewed on several occasions. A schedule of interviews, and a list of the documentation consulted, is enclosed as Annex 2.

As far as possible we have striven for a unified approach to the three cases, and have attempted to order the information under the following headings:

1. The Company
2. Background to setting up the course
3. Setting up the course
4. Finance
5. Expectations
6. Timing and release
7. The curriculum, teaching style and learning environment
8. Accreditation

9. What's in a name - publicising and filling the courses, issues of confidentiality and sensitivity
10. Evaluation, Measuring and Monitoring
11. Progression issues: where to next
12. Other college-company links

For each company there is a timetable in a box separate to the main narrative giving outline details of progress of the scheme.

Some issues seem to run through these case studies. We have drawn these together in Chapter Twelve: 'Issues'. In addition, in Chapter Eleven: 'Benefits and Blocks', we talk about the 'benefits' of and 'blocks' to workplace basic skills schemes which we have found from the cases, linking these to the benefits and blocks which the employers we spoke to in our survey felt would either encourage them to put on such schemes, or put them off from doing so. Where the case study sites had found practical solutions to the 'blocks', or problems, we have included these.

**Choosing the Case Study Sites**

In our initial submission to the Leverhulme Trust, we had intended to use the Ford 'EDAP' (Employee Development Assistance Programme) general education sponsorship scheme as one of our case studies. However, because of our own knowledge and experience, we felt that we could more usefully work by focussing on *basic skills* within workplace learning, where we had a common interest and could draw on expertise and existing networks.

We therefore wanted to choose three Case Study sites where learning was taking place in the core communication skills areas of English, Maths and Communication Skills..

**1. Baxi Heating**

The scheme at Baxi had been set up in 1989 when shop stewards on a Trade Union course at Preston College found out about the London based organization Workbase Training, which develops basic communications skills courses; they realised that this kind of training would help workers to take up vocational training schemes, and contribute more to union affairs. At more or less the same time, the outreach worker from Runshaw College, Leyland, approached the management at Baxi to talk about what their college could offer the company. After joint talks and a Training Needs Analysis, a series of pilot courses were set up at the company.

We already had contacts with Baxi Heating. Fiona Frank had carried out a study of their learning scheme in 1990 for an Open University diploma course. In 1991, at the start of this research project, classes were still going on, and a new Open Learning centre had just been opened, where workers could study in their own time with support from college tutors who would be in attendance at regular times. The scheme's Steering Committee was approached and permission was sought and granted for Baxi to be used as a Case Study site in the project.

**2. BICC**

Fiona Frank had met the personnel officer from BICC Helsby at a training seminar in late 1989. The personnel officer had told her that she was considering setting up workplace communication skills courses within the organization as a response to changes in the company such as the introduction of cashless pay, and new technology, and that she had been in touch with Workbase's Northern consultant, Stephanie Pordage.

At the beginning of 1991, a pilot series of classes were just about to start, having been held up for some time for various reasons. A new Employee Development worker was now responsible for the scheme, and a meeting was arranged with her to brief her on the research. This meeting was followed by a meeting with the Steering Committee, who discussed the project and agreed to its being used as a Case Study, on the condition that students' names wouldn't be used in the report, and that Fiona Frank would retain editorial control.

**3. Richards & Appleby.**

Just as the project was starting, while we were casting around for a possible third site for our study, we heard through the County Basic Education Advisor about an ALBSU (Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit) scheme which had been set up in September 1990 to market and develop workplace basic education at Skelmersdale College. We spoke to the Project Worker there, Pat McMellon, who at that time was just in the process of setting up a series of pilot courses at Richards & Appleby, a cosmetics manufacturing company on an industrial estate in the town.

After we discussed the research with the Project Worker, she offered to discuss the possibility of our carrying out a case study on their scheme with the Personnel Manager and the Steering Committee at the site. We then had a meeting with the Personnel Manager, and laid out the details of the research as above. After a second meeting with the Steering Committee, it was agreed that Richards & Appleby could be used as the third Case Study site: on the condition that the company could see what was written before it was published, and that no individual students' names would be used.

**Conclusions**

We now had three Case Study sites; one, Baxi Heating, in Bamber Bridge near Preston, Lancashire: one, BICC, in Helsby, near Warrington, Cheshire: and one, Richards & Appleby, in Skelmersdale, Lancashire.

There were several differences between the sites, which would, we felt, make for an interesting comparison.

Richards & Appleby was a small company employing about 250 people, but part of a German-owned organization; Baxi was a 'partnership', a kind of cooperative, with about 1000 'partners' or employees; and BICC Helsby, was a medium sized site of a UK wide company with several other sites, employing approximately 450 on the Helsby site at the start of the project.

All were manufacturing companies, with different styles of working. At the start of the research, Baxi was moving over to 'Continuous Improvement Teams' or CITs, which would lead to increasing need for basic skills among manual workers. BICC was planning to move to that way of working in the future, and Richards & Appleby's production was organised in a 'traditional' line system, but more responsibility was being sent down from supervisor level to line leader level, and new computerised systems were being introduced.

The scheme at BICC had been initiated by management; the scheme at Richards & Appleby had come from the College ALBSU project; and the Baxi programme had started due to initiatives from the Trades Unions as well as from the local College outreach programme.

There was little general training in place for manual workers in any of the companies before the schemes started: Richards & Appleby had First Aid and general on the job training; BICC had a 'flexibility' training package where workers got a bonus if they were competent in all areas in their section: and Baxi's manual workers were trained in narrow job-specific areas, but not in areas where they could benefit personally.

# Chapter Five

## Case No. 1: Richards & Appleby: an ALBSU project in Skelmersdale

---

### 1. The Company

Richards & Appleby is an old established cosmetics manufacturing company, based on an industrial estate in Skelmersdale, producing cosmetics such as lipsticks and perfumes for a range of companies including Marks and Spencers. At the time of the courses described below, February to July 1991, it employed up to 250 staff, made up mostly of women on the shop floor, and mostly of men in the warehouse and at management level. The company was taken over by Croda International in 1985, and merged with Kolmar Cosmetics Ltd, an East Grinstead based firm, in 1989. These changes, and in particular the merger, involved the company in a series of reorganization moves; including manufacture of new lines, alteration of premises, new staff, etc.

The Trade Unions on the site are APEX (Association of Professional and Executive Staff), representing the professional and white collar workers, and USDAW (Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers), which represents the majority of the shop floor workers. The work was organised on the traditional factory lines basis, each line being organised by a line leader.

### 2. The Background: Training Needs Within the Company

In 1990 the company had decided to work towards the quality standard BS5750, which was involving more recordkeeping and paperwork at all levels in the company. These changes exposed some skills training needs at Line Leader level. The requirements of the line leader job - which had previously been simply to keep the line going until all the components had been used up - now included tasks such as:

- ensuring that the line produced goods to a previously agreed target,
- accounting for the stock produced,
- keeping records of how many staff were on the line at any time,
- recording breaks in production and the reasons for any breaks,
- recording the number of reject items, and
- recording how many components were returned at the end of each shift.

In addition to these new training needs, a survey in the company in June 1990 had exposed a general lack of understanding of the relevance of Heath and Safety at Work rules and regulations throughout the workforce.

In order to address some of these issues, the Personnel Manager had been thinking about developing some new training for key staff, possibly to be focussed in the areas of management, computerization, and report writing, and had contacted some local private training organizations to find out what they could offer. Training other than basic induction, First Aid and on-the-job instruction had not hitherto been offered to the shop floor at Richards & Appleby.

**A Local Development Project at the local college**

Meanwhile, at Skelmersdale College, a two year Local Development Project had been set up in mid-1990, funded jointly by the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit (ALBSU) and Lancashire County Local Education Authority, with the aims of:

> *'- Marketing basic skills provision to employers and Trade Unions in the district of West Lancashire*
>
> *- Identifying specific workplace basic skills needs of participating companies*
>
> *- Identifying basic skills needs of individuals within the workforce*
>
> *- Implementing basic education classes within the workplace to fulfil identified needs, and*
>
> *- Ensuring opportunities for progression for participating students.'*
> (Skelmersdale College, 1990)

The project had a training input from Workbase Training built into it, using the Workbase methodology as described above, in which

> *'the success depends on a full understanding of the initiative by all those likely to be affected in any way, therefore the first stage of the project is to establish a Steering Group to monitor and evaluate the project. ... Representatives of Personnel, Trade Unions, Line Management and Workbase* [or in this case, the college] *form the Steering Group.'*
> (Workbase, March 1990).

A full-time project worker was appointed on an eighteen month contract in September 1991, and after an induction and training period, she began contacting companies in the Skelmersdale area to discuss the possibility of the college putting on basic skills classes for their workforce over a pilot period at no cost to the company.

Richards & Appleby were one of the companies first approached, in October 1990. With serendipity - because the personnel officer said she receives sometimes as many as fifty training mailshots a week - this proposal was seen to fit in well with the problems the company was

looking to address, outlined above. The project worker held initial meetings with the factory manager, the personnel manager, and an USDAW representative.

> *"Pat McMellon came and introduced the scheme. I thought it was a very good idea. ... There's much more paperwork now. For example new paperwork for line leaders. Maths and English is relevant for line leaders. ... In the stock take, if the spelling is bad and the maths is wrong, it makes more work because someone has to check it. Or on the line leader's sheets they get the counts wrong or the decimal point wrong in mixtures. It causes lay-offs."*
>
> (USDAW Shop steward)

> *"We felt it would benefit the company if the staff improved their skills in various ways. It would improve motivation and morale, and that would have a knock-on effect in improving the quality of goods, and the quality of record-keeping."*
>
> (Personnel Officer)

> *"From my point of view the Personal Effectiveness course would be very important. People have said to me that they'd like to put in for promotion, but the need to talk to management and to talk in groups would let them down. If you can't put your point over in a meeting you're doomed. English and Maths are useful too... there are people in the factory with reading and writing problems. It's not been a particular [training] need before, it's just been ignored, but I thought that this kind of training was a very good idea when it was first mooted."*
>
> ('Goods In' Manager)

A steering committee was set up consisting of representatives of management and unions, and the project worker. The steering group agreed that the project worker would carry out presentations of the scheme for the workforce, according to the Workbase Training philosophy, followed by a Training Needs Analysis - consisting of confidential and informal interviews to discuss individual training needs - with those employees who expressed interest after the presentations. (Project Worker's Progress Reports to Advisory Group, April 1991 and May 1991).

### 3. Setting up the Course

In mid-November 1990, the project worker made presentations to 14 groups, consisting of workers from Stores, Production and Warehousing. In the presentations she outlined the proposed type of training and talked about the college involvement. 164 of the 250 employees attended these presentations, and were given a form to complete to say if they wished to attend the confidential Training Needs Analysis interview. 114 ballot forms were returned (a 70% return rate) and 104 of these expressed interest in attending the interview.

Interviews were held over three days in November 1990; 82 people - a self-selected 33% of the workforce and 50% of the people attending the presentations - were interviewed (the others out of the 104 either withdrew, or were unavailable due to sick leave or holiday.) A report was prepared from the results of these interviews and presented to the Steering Committee in December 1990.

The Skelmersdale College Project Worker and the Personnel Manager from the company were both approached around this time from several places, including this Leverhulme study, with requests to make presentations at training events, and for the project to be used as a case study. Because of this the Steering Committee focussed on the need for *"sensitive use of material obtained during interviews and subsequently used in reports and publicity"*, and decided to make some changes to the original Training Needs Analysis report which was presented to the company, to produce a report for general circulation. This report left out easily identifiable quotes, and parts of the report which might be misinterpreted by outside organizations. Some of the results in the 'public access' report are laid out below.

In answer to the question 'Looking back over the last few years, have there been any changes in skills or knowledge needed in the job?', 40% of workers, specifically line-leaders, reported more reading, writing, maths and/or computing in their work. The report suggested that the forthcoming changes to computerisation would bring changes for the other 60% too.

*"I'm interested in promotion, but worried about writing and maths"*

*"I'm able to write but not able to spell properly"*

*"It's in my head, but hard to put it on paper"*

*"Sometimes people get mixed up with decimal points"*
(responses to the Training Needs interviews)

*"When Pat came in, she asked what we would be interested in. I said Maths. I only thought a few people would do it"*
(Student)

The report laid out the percentage of workers who had expressed interest in different kinds of training in basic communications skills:

*"48% of the survey group reported an interest in brush-up English training.*
*43% were interested in brush-up Maths*
*20% were interested in Metrication Training*
*20% were interested in Personal Effectiveness training."*
(Skelmersdale College ALBSU Project 1990).

Recommendations were made following on from these findings, for four two hour courses, initially of twelve weeks, to be set up in 'English Communication Skills', 'Maths Communication Skills', 'Metrication', and 'Personal Effectiveness'. In addition, the report stated that

*"In the future, the Steering Group will serve as a forum for the identification of needs as they arise. The impact of the introduction of computerisation early in 1991 could lead to areas of training needs being identified in the future".*

Several respondents had stated that they were interested in computer training, and some of the management recognised this as a training need.

*"I'd like to see computer training. ... some people have asked about it. It's possibly not feasible in the pilot courses, but it would be worthwhile. I often get asked to look at our computer: one of our three drivers can use it a bit, the others can't, and I feel all of them should know how to use it."*

('Goods In' manager)

The first round of courses started in February: four twelve week, two hour sessions, in English, Maths, Communications Skills and Metrication, as mentioned above. Students, from the permanent staff of the company, were chosen to go on the courses by the College, according to their interest and 'need' as expressed in the original training needs analysis interviews.

*"What we did was, we highlighted what people had said. I never looked at age, or where people worked. I only looked at what people wanted to do. If people had a real need, they were given priority, but we wanted to have a mixed group. We didn't want people to be stigmatised. In other factories they've had 'the thickest class' but we wanted a mixed class. It reflects the age range in the factory."*

(Project worker)

**4. Finance**

The funding of the ALBSU Project at Skelmersdale College covered the costs of the tutors, the Project Worker's time, and the costs of developing and producing materials. Loss of production due to workers' being off the lines at the classes, and management time, was covered by the company.

The Technical Manager interviewed in June 1991, when asked about the effect of the courses on costs and production levels, said that production targets had been planned around the courses; production levels were lowered in the short term, but he felt that there would be a financial payoff in benefits of a more confident workforce in the longer term. It was a bad time to run a series of courses like this during the recession, when the company was looking to minimize costs, but conversely that might be just the right time to run training, so that the company will be ready when the time comes.

The *percentage* of production lost by the classes was quite high. He told us that this was due to the fact that normally at that time of year, more workers would have been taken on to deal with Christmas orders, but those Christmas orders hadn't come through. In addition, the Personnel Manager added that the majority of the students were skilled and experienced staff who normally contributed considerably to production targets.

At the end of the first 12 week series of classes, the company was not able to fund a further series of classes, but was interested in continuing the project. The ALBSU project funded the teaching hours for a further series of three 12 week courses.

By July 1991 the recession was having a detrimental effect on Richards & Appleby's orders. After this second series of courses, the ALBSU project could no longer fund the tutorial costs. The company, with regret, was not able to do so, so the scheme finished. Though the tutorial costs of the course were covered by the ALBSU project, the company calculated that the other

costs, of lost production and management time were a considerable expense, and were not viable in the recession period when a lot of workers had been laid off and orders had been lost. They felt there was *"no leeway in the training budget in the current economic situation"* and the scheme was only possible in the six months that it ran because of the ALBSU scheme. Other sources such as LAWTEC, the local Training and Enterprise Council, were approached for financial help without success.

**5. Expectations**

The aims of the initiative, as set out in the report from the Project to the company, were

> *"To increase efficiency and motivation, together with improving interest in and understanding of productivity targets"*

with the 'justification' laid out in the Report that:

> *"as there is limited existing training and ineffective methodology for inducting employees into production practices, the results of the Training Needs Analysis will incorporate these training deficiencies into materials utilised in the training".*
> (Skelmersdale College ALBSU Project, Dec. 1990)

Some differing expectations from management, shop stewards and shop floor workers can be drawn from their comments about the courses. The unions are concerned to get good conditions for their members, and in particular to avoid layoffs.

> *"The company's point of view is to make it more efficient, and we felt the same."*
> (USDAW shop steward)

One student talked about specific duties she has to cover, and specific problems she found in her work which she hopes the classes will help with:

> *"At work, I have to multiply how many things there are on the pallets. I'm embarrassed to have forgotten how to do it. I used to use a calculator or get someone else to do it. In my job I do counts every hour. I can't spend lots of time doing it, with or without a calculator. For example, we've got to get 50,000 lipsticks out. If they're in packs of 6, how many packs and how many pallets will I need? Quite often some line leaders have wrong counts. ... You have to leave the paperwork right for everyone otherwise they might close down a job and then be a thousand items short which would cost the firm money. ... If the warehouse don't do a job it leads to timewasting in the company. For example, they might ask for 10,000 of something, but some might be missing."*
> (Student)

One manager brings up the wider issue of training to make people feel appreciated at work:

*"Maths and English are only one element. Sending people on any class makes them feel they're considered important, so that it's not just Supervisors and Managers who are eligible for training."*

(Manager)

In an initial interview early on in the life of the courses, the personnel manager told us that the courses were being promoted on the strength of how they would be of *personal* benefit to the staff; illustrating this by the fact that new technology and new production methods were bringing in the need for workers to use skills which might require some 'brushing-up'. She felt that if the company gained additional benefits from the courses that would be a good spin-off, but that they were not expecting the company to benefit in any measurable way, and that there would be no problems if that did not happen.

This is reflected by the responses from 16 students who completed a questionnaire about the courses. In answer to the questions "What did you hope to get out of the course - for yourself, and - for your job" each of the 16 respondents completed the first part, about benefits they hoped to gain for themselves. Comments included:

*"To make me a better person, to understand other people more"*

*"The achievement of being able to do the work"*

*"More confidence to go for other things"*

*"Curiosity - to see what the course was all about"*

*"I wanted to be able to speak to anyone without losing my temper."*

*"To find out whether it was as easy to re-learn".*

Seven students did not mention any benefits to do with work: two respondents specifically said that they had not gained any benefits to do with work. Those students who did mention benefits which they hoped to gain for their work, included:

*"To cope with weights on computers and scales in my QC* [Quality Control] *job"*

*"To speak to management"*

*"Understand bulk size"*

*"To understand other people more".*

In a group discussion held with some of the students, one, who was on the Personal Effectiveness course, felt that it would be helpful in her dealings with other people:

*"I wanted to learn how to ... you know ... I lose my rag easily so I wanted to start listening to people instead".*

Some students hoped that it would lead on to a college course. Two of the questionnaire respondents mentioned this aspect of the courses:

> [I hoped it would give me] *"confidence to go on to College"*
>
> *..."the confidence to attend night school"*

One student we spoke to said that she wanted to do Maths at college, but that she was frightened of going back to college at her age, so the course would give her a chance to start again. She said that at her school, a few of the pupils were taught properly, and the rest were left - and at home, the boys were pushed more than the girls: so she had not done well with her studies.

The whole area of confidence to go back to learning is dealt with in more detail in Chapter Twelve: 'Issues', and of the concept of confidence as a learning outcome, in Chapter Eleven: 'Benefits and Blocks'.

It has to be said that the personnel manager felt that not all perceptions of the course would be totally positive: she had a feeling that the German owners of the company might ask questions like "Who employed these people who can't read and write?" rather than being encouraging about the scheme.

**6. Timing and Release**

The courses at Richards & Appleby were organised to take place entirely in work time. This avoided problems of participants' having to rearrange out-of-work commitments. The courses took place during a generally slack time in production: some expected contracts had not arrived, and there had been some lay-offs. However, managers, supervisors and line leaders sometimes stopped the students from attending the classes due to pressure of work or the need to meet production targets:

> *"I definitely think it's a good thing. ... it's only the odd time I've had to say to the line leaders that it's really busy and they can't go to the class."*
>
> (Acting supervisor)

> *"I am willing to put up with losing two of my workers on a Tuesday afternoon during this slack period, but I have had to take them off the class on one occasion."*
>
> ('Goods In' manager)

In the responses to our questionnaire, 5 out of the 16 students told us that they had had difficulty in arranging cover for their work.

> *"Sometimes when my department is shortstaffed or we were very busy, I was unable to attend"*
>
> (Picker/packer)

> *"The line stopped most days"*
>
> (Line Leader)

[Cover was] *"not very well* [organised] - [on a] *number of occasions could not attend, as we were too busy on lines, not enough cover."*

One supervisor told us that she would not ask others to cover for students, but she would ask the students to make up their own work while they were on courses:

*"The students only have to make up their own targets. It would cause trouble if other people had to make up work for the people on the courses."*
(Acting supervisor)

though the personnel manager, commenting on that, said that production did not work like that, and that individuals did not have a target to meet.

This issue, of covering for students when they are on courses, is picked up again in Chapter Twelve: 'Issues'.

**7. The Curriculum, Teaching Style and Learning Environment**

In the original report to the company, the four proposed subject areas (English, Maths, Metrication and Personal Effectiveness) were accompanied by notes about how the course content could be work-related. The 'English Communication Skills' course was to cover *"specific difficulties such as spelling, grammar, punctuation and form filling skills needed to work efficiently"*. The 'Maths Communication Skills' and Metrication courses were to be established *"with materials developed to take account of workplace needs and practice"*. The Personal Effectiveness course was to be designed *"incorporating work related materials and verbal communication"*. (Skelmersdale College, ibid)

Examples of work-related materials adapted for use in the courses included *"clock cards, company regulations, safety policy and fire drill regulations"* (Skelmersdale College May 1991).

In view of the attitude expressed above by the Personnel Manager, that the company was not demanding any measurable outcome from the courses other than an improvement in people's individual confidence in using basic skills, it was explicitly stated by the management that they did not want to have control over the content of the course.

In a discussion we held with a group of the college tutors working on the project, the opinion was expressed that they were very pleased that the company wasn't demanding 'outcomes' and making any specific demands for topics to be covered in the classes, as it made it easier to negotiate the curriculum between the tutors and the students.

In the Maths and metrication classes, the students brought in some of the company's products to work on weights & measures with; in the English class, one group worked on rewriting the company's pension documentation in 'plain English' - to very good effect, as the rewritten document was then taken on and used throughout the company.

The Maths and English classes were run as *"individually negotiated programmes to meet individual needs"*, with occasional group activities. The Metrication class was run mostly as a taught group, using teaching materials developed by the Baxi-Runshaw College staff team, with a good deal of practical work using products manufactured on site.

The Personal Effectiveness class was run in a different way, with roleplays and group discussions: with the idea that in the overall group the students were able to get something out of it for themselves as individuals. These were initially about real-life work situations, but these were found to be causing some problems among the group, so quite soon in the course imaginary scenarios were used.

> *"There have been problems with the [Personal Effectiveness] course. A few people dropped out due to touching on personal items."*
>
> (Shop Steward)

> *"We've used nearly everything. Discussion, flip charts, we've measured things, played in the water, played in the sink, worksheets, homework .."*
>
> (Student)

> *"I thought we'd all start at the same level and that we'd all go at the same pace. I was surprised. It's a good group. If someone's stuck we can move on to other things. Not like being at school ... We do our own worksheets. We follow them on our own or sometimes with the help of the tutor. ... You work at your own pace and in your own time. At school you have to take it in with everyone else, this is more relaxed and informal. The teachers are easy to talk to."*
>
> (Student)

> *"If you mentioned that you're dropping behind a bit, she'll help you. You know the young ones, they can go through it dead quick, but we're stuck on feet and inches, the older ones, they'll help you."*
>
> (Student)

> *"The course we did at work - I can't really explain - you were learning, but it was like a 'friendly learning', and the teacher set up an individual programme - for you."*
>
> (Student, quoted in 'Not Just A Number')

**8. Accreditation**

The tutors working at Richards & Appleby wrote submissions for the four courses to be accredited by the Merseyside Open College Federation. These were validated in June 1991. 42 students gained certificates for the work that they had done and, together with other students who had completed courses at Skelmersdale College, they received their certificates at a presentation ceremony and buffet supper which took place at the College, in September 1991. The event also celebrated the success of the scheme in becoming North West Regional Winners in the National Training Awards Scheme.

An attractive display board with photographs of the students receiving their certificates, and drawing attention to the Training Award, was later placed in a prominent position in the company reception area.

### 9. What's in a Name? Publicising and Filling the Courses, Issues of Confidentiality and Sensitivity

The name chosen for the initiative from the beginning was 'Training At Work', and it was felt by all concerned with the project, within the steering committee - and mentioned to us several times - that it would be important to avoid the use of words and phrases involving 'literacy', to which it was felt that a stigma was attached which would not be helpful to associate with this initiative. One of the canteen staff, making extra teas for the classes, said that the teas were for the 'Career People', and that name stuck for a while.

> *"We don't want the students to be seen as Special Needs - we don't want to use the word 'literacy' and have people in the company tarred with that brush. We'd rather use expressions like 'Sharpen up your skills'."*
>
> (Factory Manager)

The Ormskirk Advertiser referred to the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit in a report in connection with the project, which *"upset the unions and the management"* (Personnel officer): the Steering Committee had gone to great lengths to avoid using the terms 'basic literacy/numeracy' and did not appreciate these terms being associated with the scheme in the local press.

Chapter Twelve: 'Issues', includes a discussion on avoiding 'stigma' and factors involved in getting a good 'image' for the programmes.

### 10. Evaluation, Measuring and Monitoring

The personnel manager, interviewed after the courses had finished, felt that there had been a measurable improvement in recorded errors in the company since the classes began: in a measuring exercise implemented by the company to look at the effectiveness of the classes by checking requisition sheets, it was found that before the training, there was approximately 30% error in issues of components from the warehouse to the line, and after training a 6% error was measured. In addition, the personnel manager felt there was considerable improvement in the legibility and accuracy of production charts, i.e. reports written by line leaders on line returns, reasons for loss of production, etc.

The Technical Manager, interviewed about the scheme in June 1991, felt that the students were more aware in terms of health and safety, and also in terms of communication of information. An example he gave of this was that the management uses the noticeboards to inform people of forthcoming visits by potential customers, and in the past these were ignored: now he has been finding that the students are taking notice, realising that these visits are going to affect them, and asking questions. He has noticed an overall change in the workers' tendencies to ask questions and query decisions.

The personnel manager comments that when announcements were given to the workforce in the past, these usually went without comment, but now, she says, at least an hour has to be put aside for the long discussion session which usually ensues.

The project collated evaluation sheets for all parties involved in the courses, and prepared an evaluation report for the company. The report comments on improved levels of communication, and improvements in the short-term in relations on the shop-floor. The Project Worker's views were that these kind of improvements were very noticeable, if hard to quantify - but that it would be necessary to continue the training to keep up the momentum and enthusiasm gained during the courses.

We discuss issues around monitoring and evaluation in Chapter Twelve: 'Issues'.

**11. Progression - Where to Next?**

After the courses stopped at the factory, the personnel manager's feeling was that the students would have wanted to go on for longer, and cover more subjects, within the scheme. This was mentioned by others involved.

> *"A few people are asking about the next courses. There's a big interest in computers".*
>
> (USDAW shop steward)

As it was, the company has a policy where it will pay for any college class for under 21 year olds, and any work-related or 'slightly work-related' class for over 21 year olds. The tutors offered, for some students, their first link and contact with the local college.

> *"I want to do A level Art. A few people on the course want to go on to college. The tutor is bringing information in next week. You think of Colleges as young people in their twenties. But it isn't. It's people of any age."*
>
> (Student)

19 employees were known to be attending evening classes at the local college, in the college year 91/92, in subjects such as English, Maths, French, Typing, Biology and Word Processing. About half of these students had attended classes in work time in 1991. The company was paying for those courses which are fee-paying.

**12. Other College-Company Links**

The Project Worker went on to run some courses in 'preparing for BS5750', and 'ensuring accuracy in measurement'. Other courses in teamworking for supervisors were planned, but not delivered due to problems of release and short term order demands.

It is not planned to resume basic skills training unless the economic situation improves; but the personnel manager felt that those shop floor workers who attended the (voluntary)

communications skills classes would get more out of the (compulsory) BS5750 course, because the project provided a good foundation for their learning. This was the first time that the shop floor had had any ongoing training, and the personnel manager felt that it has provided the company with a good model to build on.

The college always had good relations with the company: their Managing Director was a governor of the college; but since the completion of the ALBSU project the first-line contact between the college and the company has often been between the personnel officer and the Project worker. For example, the personnel officer contacted the Project worker to ask about Desk Top Publishing courses run by the college, and she was able to refer her on to the college Business Studies department: and when another department at the college was offered support by LAWTEC to run an NVQ (National Vocational Qualifications) programme in companies, the Project Worker was approached by that department and asked whether she felt Richards & Appleby would be an appropriate company to contact. So the initial approach from the ALBSU Project has led to lasting links between the college and the company.

**Case No. 1: Richards & Appleby. Timetable**

September 1990: Skelmersdale College ALBSU Project worker takes up appointment.

October 1990: Project worker contacts Richards & Appleby Personnel Officer, holds initial meetings with Personnel Officer, Factory Manager, and USDAW representative. Steering Committee set up consisting of Personnel Officer, Factory Manager, USDAW shop steward, and the Project worker.

29 October 1990: Presentation by Project worker to management and unions.

7 November 1990: Presentations to stores, production & warehousing.

End November 1990: Training needs analysis (TNA) carried out: interviews with 82 people.

January 1991: conclusions and recommendations of TNA report sent out to company

Feb-May 1991: 1st round of courses, in 'Communications Skills Maths', Personal Effectiveness, Metrication, and English

March 1991: steering committee completed by addition of a student representative.

May 1991: entered in National Training Awards Scheme

June 1991: courses accredited by Merseyside Open College Federation

Summer 1991: selected as North West Regional Winners in National Training Awards scheme: put forwards to national judging

June-July 1991: 2nd round of courses

September 1991: certificate presentation and buffet evening.

October 1991: Judged 170th out of 1500 entries in National Training Award scheme

January 1992: BS5750 courses for groups of shop floor staff run by Project worker

15 Jan 1992: Presentation of national training awards, London, from Duke of Westminster, attended by Managing Director.

# Chapter Six

## Case No. 2. BICC Helsby: Workbase and Local Colleges

### 1. The Company.

BICC is an international company specialising in the manufacture of cables. It has various manufacturing sites around Britain. At the time that the fieldwork was done (March - July 1991, with followup in March-May 1992) the Communications and Cables Division at Helsby, Cheshire, employed 864 people, with 600 of these located in 3 decentralised manufacturing units, which produce different ranges of cables and complementary assemblies for use in the Communications field.

Each unit is financially independent, and the unit manager decides on the training policy for each unit without central control.

There were two trades unions within the company representing shop floor workers: the Transport and General Workers Union (T&G), the Associated Engineering Union (AEU), with the T & G representing most of the workers on the shop floor.

The story set out here is that of a series of classes which ran between January and September 1991 at two units at the site, and of events after September 1991, when some classes were still run, but with a different college and a different structure.

### 2. Background to Setting up the Course

A system of on-the-job training existed within the factory for shop-floor workers, with incentives for becoming a trainer, and for learning the whole range of jobs in one department.

In 1989 the Personnel Manager at the site was beginning to feel that new working practices, like cashless pay and new technology, which were being introduced into the company, would cause a problem for some of the existing workforce, and that a different kind of training programme was necessary to combat these issues. She contacted Workbase Training, and commissioned a Training Needs Analysis of a sample of the hourly paid workers, with the aim of developing a strategy to meet their education and training needs.

### 3. Setting up the Course

A Steering Group was set up, consisting of representatives from Personnel, Line Management, Trade Unions, and Workbase. The steering group first met in February 1990, to agree the aims and objectives of the training needs analysis, the questionnaire to be used, and the time scale.

Briefing meetings were then held with groups of staff in the 'target groups' to give them full information and allay any concerns they may have. Following this, 87 individual, confidential training needs interviews were carried out by Workbase in the Wiredrawing, Warehouse/Despatch, and Cords sections of the company, in order to establish the individuals' training needs, educational skills, and interests, and to establish the company's corporate training needs. The aims and objectives of Workbase's Communication Skills Audit as given in their report to the company are given as Annex 3.

*Training Needs*

Workbase found that, of those interviewed:

- *"7% had a need for foundation communication skills training*
  [i.e. very basic English and Maths - elaborated below]

- *24% had a need for general maths training*

- *16% had a need for general metrication training."*

There were also needs expressed by the workers interviewed for various different courses, particularly Induction, Health and Safety at Work, and also First Aid, Confidence Building, Languages and Computer Keyboard Skills.

In the summary of the report, the attention of the company was drawn to the 7% with a need for 'foundation communication skills':

> *"It cannot be stressed too strongly that these people are experiencing severe difficulties at work. Lack of these skills is causing distress and has eroded much of their confidence. When asked how they feel about reading and writing the replies were, 'I detest writing - I can't do it'. 'It's something you hide from your workmates'."*
>
> (Workbase, ibid)

The report made recommendations for a series of courses to cover the needs expressed by the workers interviewed:

- *"a (minimum) 70 hour Foundation Communication Skills course for those workers with basic skills needs*

- *a series of (minimum) 40 hour brush-up writing skills courses covering punctuation, spelling, grammar, etc.*

- *a series of (minimum) 20 hours general maths and metrication courses*

- *a 20 hour report writing course*

- *a 15-20 hour confidence building and verbal communication skills course"*

In addition to these recommendations on communications skills, the report also recommended that the company set up:

- *"a structured induction programme including on and off the job training*
- *short, 10 hour pre-retirement courses covering finance, pensions, leisure, welfare etc*
- *further job-specific skills training to cover specific needs arising on the shop floor."*

Around the time of the Training Needs Analysis, the company was going through difficult financial times, and the scheme was put 'on ice' by the company. However, there was continuing interest from Workbase itself in getting the scheme established. The organization felt it was bad practice to raise the hopes of workers by interviewing them about training without proceeding further, and bad public relations for Workbase too. In addition, the manager of one of the three units in the company had personal links with a Basic Education worker at Mid Cheshire College, and between them that link also helped to keep the idea alive.

In May 1990, a new senior lecturer in charge of the section dealing with ABE was appointed at Mid Cheshire College. Backed by Workbase, she applied for a LEA Development Fund grant to put on 100 hours of classes at BICC. This was approved in September 1990, and she then went back to BICC with the offer, and to see if people's hopes could be resurrected.

The Workbase consultant made further visits to the company, and the Senior Lecturer came to the company on a couple of occasions doing publicity for the scheme, together with a colleague from the college. While the senior lecturer talked to students about what sort of things they might want on a work based course, her colleague followed up queries from people who were interested in taking up courses at the college. These visits were publicised through the departments.

> *"We had a couple of presentations in the canteen. I met them and I asked them general questions about whether we'd be forced to do it, whether the details would be given to management. They said it was a government run thing and not to do with management."* (Student)

> *"Both of us had interviews about a year ago - we didn't realise it was the same thing as these classes. One in three people were interviewed, then nothing happened, and nobody mentioned anything. This time we went for a talk, the tutor explained what the courses were, for example job applications, letters, that sort of thing'.*
>
> (Student)

*Launching of the scheme*

After these presentations, it was decided to launch the scheme as a pilot, using the LEA Local Development Grant, with a possible commitment by the company to continue the scheme on the same lines in the future. At this stage the responsibility for the project was handed over to the

Employee Development Officer, who had joined the company shortly after the initial contact with Workbase had been made. The scheme fell within her staff development remit.

*Organization of the classes*

A new steering committee was set up, 'driven' by the Employee Development Officer, and including three management members (though one, the personnel manager from the Cords Unit, had left and was not replaced for several months) and two Union representatives.

The two Union representatives on the steering committee were a senior T&G shop steward, who was not a student (he worked in the unit where classes weren't made available, as mentioned below) and another T&G shop steward (a woman) who attended the Cords classes.

The series of classes began in January/February 1991, with a weekly English class in the 'Cords' unit, and a 'workshop' type Open Learning session, mainly on Mathematics but with some English, running twice a week in Unit Two. Although there was a general interest in the scheme from workers in the third unit, the unit manager took a decision not to take on the scheme in that unit as, we were told, *"in the light of prevailing business considerations, this form of education was not a priority".*

**4. Finance**

The first series of courses, 100 'pilot hours', were, as mentioned above, funded by a County Council Local Development Grant. The rate paid to the college had been at the basic part-time tutor hourly rate, plus travel and equipment costs, but with no extra on-costs for the college. After the original 100 hours were up, the programme would be evaluated and the company had to consider continuing funding the programme. When the pilot hours ran out, Mid Cheshire College quoted new full cost fees to BICC, which included administrative costs. The Company agreed to pay the new fees, and continued to cover the cost of the training for some months after a second price rise had been announced by the college.

Due partly to this second price rise, and partly for other reasons (discussed below in 11: Progression), the company asked a second college, Halton College, to take over the courses. For the short time that this college was working in the company, their fees (set at the level that Mid Cheshire first charged) were paid by the company.

**5. Expectations**

As mentioned above, the company had introduced cashless pay and new technology into its processes, and was using metric units in its production. There were changes in the way that the company wanted people to think about work: with ideas about flexibility, teamworking, and enlarging of people's job titles.

> *"Now there are more forms. People have to write details of test results, quality aspects, and running hours. 15 to 20 years ago, the work was different."*
> (Manager)

*"I didn't understand metrication or decimalization. I'd see a figure like 0.5 but I didn't really know what it meant."*

(Student)

*"More written capabilities are needed in my department now, and these are growing - for example, recording details of test results, radial thickness of cables. You have to take five readings and take the mean average, which involves decimals and calculators. The figures get fiddled, or else people get their mates to do it. They have to do time sheets and quantity check details, which have caused some difficulties."*

(Manager)

*"At one time it was only the supervisor who did the writing, but now the onus is coming down to the operator".*

(T & G Shop Steward)

Quality procedures made their own demands on workers:

*"For BS5750 I'm doing a one off job at the moment. Writing down details of each job starting from the beginning: - 'You cut off the cable at 30 cm' - so I have to analyse each job and write out instructions. Then I get someone who can't do the job to do it to see if it's clear. If not, I start again."*

(Student)

There was an expectation on the part of management and also the students that the courses would be of benefit in work, but also all parties expressed the view that gains would be made which would be useful in the students' personal lives as well.

*"There aren't any measurable spin-offs, but there are many unmeasurable benefits. We want to be seen as a 'caring company'. Increasing people's confidence benefits the people and the company."*

(Employee development officer)

Some of the students had this kind of expectation from the course:

*"It will help with my kid when he goes to school. He's two and a half now"*

*"It's nice to use your brain instead of woolgathering"*

*"It makes you more alert. It gives you something to think about. ... It relieves boredom."*

Not all managers at BICC felt that the scheme was going to be of benefit to the company. The manager of Unit One, who was not interviewed for the study, quoted above as giving his reasons for not taking on the courses in his unit as: *"in the light of prevailing business considerations, this form of education was not a priority"* reportedly said to the T&G Senior Shop Steward that

he wasn't going to pay for people to learn to read and write, which they should have done at school.

*The Trades Unions*

In early 1991, the T & G Senior Shop Steward was saying that he had had some pressure from his union nationally to support the scheme, and that he thought that perhaps the TUC was issuing directives about it.

He felt that the most important gain from a Trade Union point of view was to educate its members, to make them more aware, and increase their self-confidence: if the Trade Unions helped in establishing the courses on site, they would be seen to be helping to reach those ends. He himself worked in the unit where the scheme was not running, and was thus not able to take up the classes himself.

One of the tutors who had worked with the Cords group reported that one student's aim was to speak at a Union meeting - and she had done so.

And a student who was also a shop steward was asked whether she felt there would be benefits from the course for the unions:

> *"It might make you feel more confident to speak at Union council meetings. You might understand lectures on profit and loss for the union".*
>
> (Student/Shop Steward)

The senior shop steward talked about members he knew who would freeze at the mention of a course, and who would go off sick rather than go on a course where they might reveal that they had problems with reading and writing. He knew of one member who was literally losing sleep over a course he had to go on shortly. That particular person hadn't started the 'Workbase' courses, the shop steward said, as he was worried about 'the unknown' and being made to look a fool in the classes. It was hard to know, he said, how to encourage this kind of person into the classes, but he knew that they would be of benefit to people. (This issue, encouraging the group known among adult educators as 'traditional non-attenders' into the classes, has been examined in several studies, and is discussed further in Chapter Twelve: 'Issues'.)

One group that this shop steward felt would benefit from the classes was the older learner. He talked about the increasing incidence of members he knew of who had retired, and who would be completely at a loose end, not knowing what to do with their time. He had recently heard of several cases of people dying within a year of retirement, and he felt that any kind of education introduced at work would be of help in dealing with the general lack of interest in the world which sometimes accompanied retirement.

**6. Timing and Release**

The company wanted to see an equal commitment from the students in terms of hours put in to the classes, with a two hour class being made up of an hour in work time and an hour in the student's own time.

This worked in Unit Two, where the workers, mainly men, work a 4 day on, 4 day off, shift system, alternating day and night, and would not be able to go to a regular college class, but had quite a lot of free time when they weren't at work:

> *"... some people have tried to take up courses in their own time including computer training, technical skills and management training. However, due to the shift patterns, it was not possible to continue these courses without arriving slightly late every two weeks."*
>
> (Workbase, 1990 ibid)

> *"It's been set up as a drop in centre because of the shift work. It's not the same group each time, it would fluctuate. You might get two one week, ten the next. That happens, but some people who live nearby come in on their rest days too. The interest is growing."*
>
> (Course tutor, June 1991)

> *"I wouldn't do it outside. It's more convenient with having a family. Doing it in work time is better, but I also come in on my own time, so the travel time is extra. I wouldn't do a college course because I do four days on and four days off and sometimes work nights".*
>
> (Student, June 1992)

The classes were organised at the end of the daytime shift, between 6 and 8 in the evening, and workers would arrive an hour before the end of their shift, and either stay for two hours, or take work home after an hour.

The Cords section, conversely, was made up of women who worked regular daytime shifts. The original idea was two, two hour evening classes for this group too. The production manager only wanted to provide one hour of release, however, in this section, so it was decided to just run one session a week. Because of the particular needs of the group this was changed to lunchtime, and eventually became a one and a half hour class, all in work time. Various views on the timing of this class are given below. College and Company management seem to question the women's commitment:

> *"The original thought was that it would be two hours* [partly in the women's own time]. *They didn't openly say they wouldn't stay, but they were going after an hour and a half."*
>
> (Section Head)

> *"The production manager felt that the unit couldn't afford any more than one hour of company time a week, and the women weren't prepared to give their own time up, which was a great disappointment. It may be that at the end the business*

*manager won't be prepared to put money into the scheme, if the women don't put their own time in, and the whole thing might fizzle out."*

(Employee development officer)

However, the students and one course tutor we spoke to gave a different view, bringing into the arena the question of other things women had to do after work:

*"They said it was at nights, but married women with kids can't do courses straight after work, so now it's an hour and a half all in work time. It's 11.30 till one p.m. The original idea was half an hour in work time, half an hour in your own time, but now it's all in work time. An hour wasn't long enough - even an hour and a half goes very quickly. People aren't prepared to give up half an hour lunch which is all their lunch break. No-one would have gone. We're working for eight hours and we have half an hour for lunch. You're not allowed to eat and drink at your workplace, so they decided to do the whole class before lunch."*

(Student)

*"The employer was looking for a time commitment on their part: but they do do work at home, which proves some commitment."*

(Course tutor)

There have been some recent studies about women and training at work: the issue about what happens when working women and others who have responsibilities for family and childcare are asked to give up their own time to do classes is dealt with in more detail in Chapter Twelve: 'Issues'.

*Release*

In the 'Cords' section, one student trained another person to do her particular job, so that she could attend the classes. In a production section where there weren't many people working, two of the students told us that if there was a rush on, it might be that they couldn't always attend the classes, as the nature of the job meant that the work couldn't be done at any other time.

In Unit Two, the manager told us that

*"We just write off that lost production. It's in the last hour when there's least done anyway. There is some production lost but possibly indirect gains made. People will come back and put extra hours in. I have no objection to people going".*

It seems essential that there is commitment to the courses, and good knowledge about the courses, among direct line managers, as in this case. A situation where financial resources are being put into a training scheme by one part of a company, and people in another part of the company find that it conflicts with the targets that they are expected to meet, for example, would lead to serious problems.

## 7. The Curriculum, Teaching Style and Learning Environment

The fieldworker did not visit the factory during class times, and did not visit either of the classrooms during the fieldwork time, so all the comments on the facilities are based on interviews with students and tutors.

*The learning environment*

The 'Open Learning' workshop in Unit Two was set up in a small conference room, away from the factory, with a large table in the centre, and about ten chairs round the table: the space was comfortable for up to about ten students, but cramped when there was a larger group. The students had access to the room all week, and materials were left in the cupboard for them: it was also used by other groups as a meeting room.

The tutor felt that the atmosphere in the room was quite cheerful, and that when the door was closed, the factory felt a long way away, which was helpful for the classes. The student from this group who was interviewed felt that the atmosphere was good, but that the room was too small:

> *"We're put away in a little dingy room. It's not very big. It's not suitable really for a lot of people."*

The Cords group met in a room which was used for other purposes, and occasionally had to use alternative accommodation when that room was in use - including the boardroom, on one occasion. The students from that group interviewed felt that

> *"the room was nice and comfy".*

*The curriculum and teaching style*

The English classes in the Cords department were loosely based on work related materials both brought into the class by students, and discussed between the tutors and the personnel manager in the department. Other, non-work related topics were also used. The use of the different competences demanded by 'Wordpower', the new City & Guilds basic English accreditation system, was appreciated by the tutor, as it meant that the students could cover areas which weren't directly work-related, such as 'reading different types of materials', 'expressing themselves orally', but which were still working towards achieving the Wordpower certificate.

In the 'open learning' setting in Unit 2, which was mainly Maths but with one student doing English, one student was taking GCSE Maths, and most of the others were taking Numberpower, the City & Guilds basic maths accreditation system. The tutor felt that this was very useful, as it involved students bringing in relevant things from home (such as bills including VAT amounts, etc). She felt that people were developing an interest in the subject. The personnel department had specifically told the tutor that she didn't have to achieve any work-related 'outcomes' from the course: she was hoping that the students would want to come and learn to use a calculator and learn basic sums. The range of topics covered by some of the different students in the first weeks of the course included:

- *Letter writing - form filling*
- *Measurement (length, capacity, volume) - (metric) - decimals*
- *Linear measurement (metric)*
- *Fractions and Algebra*
- *Decimals, Fractions, Percentages, Ratio and Proportion, letter writing*
- *Algebra and geometry*
- *Graphs - Algebra - Basic Statistics*

(Mid-Cheshire College, 1991)

At these sessions, 'in' and 'out' trays were provided in order to provide a marking service for those who, due to shift patterns and other reasons, could not come into the sessions frequently. Video tapes were also made available for private study.

## 8. Accreditation

Wordpower and Numberpower were used in the classes, as discussed above under 'curriculum'. These were found very helpful by the tutors we spoke to. In addition to students becoming more interested in the subject, as mentioned above, the tutors also felt that this kind of accreditation was useful in terms of being a way of reporting very real 'outcomes' to the management, without the students' having to take an exam or have their work looked at by the management.

## 9. What's in a Name - Publicising and Filling the Courses, Issues of Confidentiality and Sensitivity

The classes were called, variously by different people interviewed, 'Workbase', 'Studybase', 'The Lunchtime Group', 'The Cords Group'. The Section Head said that there had been a conscious decision made not to use the terms 'Literacy and Numeracy' or 'Adult Basic Education/ABE': the college had discussed this with the company, who had agreed. Publicity posters for the scheme used phrases like 'Improve Your Maths', 'Improve your Communications Skills'. The Employee Development officer consistently referred to the scheme in conversations and reports as 'Workbase'.

Although the college staff and the company was hoping to reach the seven percent highlighted in the original Workbase report as 'needing foundation communications skills', it was expected by all parties that people of a higher level would be the first to attend the classes. They too needed help with communications skills at their own level. As news about the courses filtered through the company through word of mouth, it was felt that those of a lower level of skills would begin to attend - which one tutor felt was actually happening.

The curriculum and the register of attendance was kept confidential, on the recommendation of Workbase, which was seen as a very positive measure by the students.

> *"We were told that the College wouldn't report back to management about performance. ... It's important that the bosses woudn't know what your standard was. If they found out ... if you've hidden a weakness for so long, you could be shot down in flames."*
>
> (Student - who made sure we knew he wasn't talking about himself)

In a tutor's report, it was suggested that one way of remedying the problem of students being embarrassed to attend classes in basic mathematics might be to double them up with computer sessions:

> *"it might be worth exploring ... that the atttendance at Workbase can be paired with the computer sessions - there is no indignity in learning to operate a computer, whilst there is considerable anxiety about appearing to need help with the basics."*
>
> (Mid Cheshire College, 1991)

**10. Evaluation, Measuring and Monitoring**

The College prepared an evaluation report on the scheme at the end of the Local Development Grant sponsored sessions, just over two months after the scheme had started. This was a requirement of the LEA, laying out the original aims and objectives of the project next to the actual achievements. The report concluded:

> *"To date, both styles of provision* [the short course in Communications Skills in the Cords department, and the drop-in style Maths provision in Unit Two] *are proving to be successful. ... After a very short time, the project looks to be well on the way to achieving all the objectives, with the slight modification to ... timing ... . New students are being welcomed all the time as the provision is promoted within the firm, mainly by the students themselves.*
>
> *A measure of its success is that some of the students from the lunchtime group actually spoke at a union meeting for the first time ever - it remains to be seen whether or not BICC will reap the benefits in a more confident and skilled group of people."*
>
> (Mid Cheshire College, 1991)

The report summarised the 'outcomes achieved' by the Project in terms of the two courses having been set up, the company having agreed to pay for the continuation of the 'Drop-in' style course, and that *"management and students have expressed satisfaction with individual learning which has taken place"*. In addition, the report listed, under the heading 'Scope for further Advice/Support identified':

> *"a) MCTS* [Mid Cheshire Training Services, the 'business arm' of the college] *now involved for full cost work.*

*b) Enquiries for computer courses, languages, GCSEs from employees. MCTS involved*

*c) BICC wish* [the Mid-Cheshire College ABE coordinator] *to continue as liaison person for basic skills work."*

(Mid-Cheshire College, ibid)

At the same time, the Employee Development officer reported back to the management of the company, as decisions were to be made about continuing funding of the scheme. A survey of 22 students attending the Open Learning facility produced 6 returned questionnaires, which were used in the compilation of her (internal) report.

The report was generably favourable, and was *"intended to show that Workbase is a valuable activity, and that progress is already evident".*

Problems set out in the report included that of lack of continuity of tutors.

*"I believe that tutor continuity is critical to the scheme's success. Personal support and encouragement is especially important in the area of basic skills, where self-confidence is a major problem. To date, we have lost two tutors (both since replaced) with another - the current 'mainstay' - going soon."*

(The common occurence of high turnover of tutors in the ABE field, exemplified here, is examined in more detail in Chapter Twelve: 'Issues'.)

The Employee Development Officer suggested that a longer-term solution to this problem might be a *"BICC-employed resource ... maybe even combining it with a general Personnel admin role, so that the employee was available on a more flexible basis"*, and costings for this option were attached to the report, though not followed up during the life of the project.

Some students' comments quoted from the returned questionnaires included responses to the question: 'Changes which would make Workbase more attractive to others' -

*"more room (2)*

*a computer facility (2)*

*better management encouragement*

*more equipment*

*more time allocated to tutoring*

*more materials to take away"*

and other comments included:

*"I just hope Management don't stop Workbase, just when I am getting used to attending"*

and

*"My brain feels revitalised after having to use it at Workbase."*

A skills checklist was being developed for students from Unit Two, to "*measure their progress against workplace objectives*", but this was not followed up in any structured way.

About a year later, at the time of my last visit to the company, March 1992, after several changes (see below) the Employee Development Officer no longer felt that it was possible to measure any benefits from the scheme to the company: some individuals benefitted and continued to attend regularly, and some of these had been 'left hanging' and wanting more. She felt, looking back, that supervisors could have been encouraged more to send students to the classes; that the content could have been more work-related; that the confidentiality of the registers and record-keeping was useful in encouraging students to come forward, but didn't help in record-keeping; that the scheme could have been managed and resourced better. She feels that a more work-related content would have more benefits for the company: and plans were in place as set out below for the continuation of the scheme with a new organization and more along those lines.

**11. Progression Issues: Where to Next?**

The 100 pilot hours funded by the County had been at the basic part-time tutor hourly rate, plus travel and equipment costs, but with no extra on-costs for the college, as mentioned above. When the pilot hours 'ran out', (in April 1991 for the Unit 2 classes and in June for the Cords classes) Mid Cheshire College quoted new full cost fees to BICC, which included administrative costs. It was then agreed to carry on classes up to the end of June, paid for by BICC. At the beginning of July, a second price change had been notified to BICC from the college, and it was agreed that some classes would run over the holidays, up to September, with a further review at that time.

Over the time of the classes, for various reasons, there were several changes in tutors which was leading to lack of continuity, and this factor together with the further price rises in Mid Cheshire College's provision led to BICC approaching Halton College in September 1991, and asking them to take over the provision.

The employee development worker no longer had a remit to look after training in Unit 1, and the English group there was not continued. The 'open learning' provision was kept on in Unit 2, but with some changes in timetabling of the classes; the evening provision was changed to daytime, and with changes also taking place in the shift patterns, attendance dropped. Eventually, in February 1992, these classes were temporarily stopped, after no students had turned up for one or two weeks.

*New Working Practices*

Other changes at the company had included some redundancies, and proposals were being implemented to go over to a teamworking approach. At the time of the follow-up visit to the company and the college, March 1992, a presentation had been given by the college to management, and plans were being discussed to put the scheme in place again, but using it as a way of underpinning the changes to teamworking by running minute taking, note-taking, interpersonal skills and report writing sessions for all the employees, linked in to in-house group sessions in problem solving and teamworking. The college ABE coordinator was working with other college departments, and was hoping to use this new curriculum to reach students who might then in the future be interested in the basic skills classes.

The new scheme was to have a new name rather than 'Workbase' which apart from being Workbase Training's registered trade mark - and therefore not available to be used as a name by these classes - was now felt by the college and the company to be 'a service for people with problems', and therefore to carry its own stigma.

*Final Notice*

However, all these developments were somewhat overtaken by the news, announced in June 1992, that Unit Two was to close down in August 1992, with the workers in that unit being made redundant, and the manufacturing business being transferred to BICC's manufacturing unit in North Manchester. The Employee Development Officer's letter to us informing us of the bad news concludes this section:

> *"I think it is fair to say that we are now unable to foresee any immediate prospects for 'workplace education' on Helsby Site, as the remaining areas have shown no interest in the concept".*

**Case No. 2: BICC. Timetable**

1989: Company adopts new technology and cashless pay. Personnel manager approaches Workbase Training.

6 Feb 1990: Steering Committee meets to agree aims and objectives of Training Needs Analysis

7 - 22 Feb 1990: Presentations made by Workbase consultant to workforce; Training Needs Analysis carried out with 87 workers

March 1990: Report made by Workbase to BICC recommending various courses of differing lengths to fulfil specific needs

May 1990: Section head at Mid Cheshire College applies to LEA for Local Development Grant

September 1990: Local Development Grant approved

Early 1991: Scheme relaunched

Jan-Feb 1991: Classes begin in Units One and Two, tutor fees covered by Local Development Grant - English in Unit One ('Cords') 1 and a half hours a week - Maths 'open learning' style in Unit 2, 2 hours a week

May/June 1991: Classes continue, tutor fees (at higher rate) covered by BICC

September 1991: 2nd price rise announced by Mid Cheshire College. Classes taken over by Halton (North Cheshire) College (fees covered by BICC)

February 1992: Classes stopped by college after attendance falls .

April 1992: New series of courses planned by college in Report-writing, team-working.

June 1992: Plans announced to close Unit 2 completely in August 1992 and transfer the business to BICC's manufacturing unit in North Manchester. All developments on workplace learning in this and the other two units curtailed.

# Chapter Seven

## Case No. 3: Baxi Heating: 'F.A.M.E.' in Bamber Bridge, Preston

### Introduction

The scheme at Baxi Heating, in contrast to the two other cases outlined here, is an ongoing one, and has been in place for longer than the other two North West companies' schemes mentioned above. It began in 1989, and was still continuing, with several new developments, at the time of writing (early 1993). The 'Adult Learning at Work' Research Associate had been involved with the scheme at Baxi since late 1989, and we have continued to keep in touch with the scheme's progress right up to the end of the life of the research. Thus, although the main detail of what follows is based on interviews with shop stewards, students, college staff and management conducted during the 'active data collection' periods, the whole is informed by our wider knowledge of the scheme as it has developed over a longer period.

The longer life of this project has allowed more time for the longer term benefits of the programme to become apparent to all participants, and for any problems to surface and have a chance of having solutions found for them. It has also meant that the scheme has attracted national attention from researchers and policy-makers. Fiona Frank has written in more detail about the early days of the Baxi scheme elsewhere (Frank, 1990); other studies of different kinds of training company have used Baxi as a case (Metcalf, 1992; Forrester, Payne & Ward, forthcoming, and others), and the scheme has been featured in the local and national press.

We present below an overview of the scheme over its life so far, including a picture of how the motivations and expectations of all parties have changed over time.

### 1. The Company

Baxi Heating, based in Bamber Bridge, 3 miles south of Preston, Lancashire, is an unusual company, in that it is a 'partnership', where each worker owns a share in the company and takes a share in the profits each year. The company manufactures central heating boilers and other heating appliances, and has a staff of around 900. A recent feature on the company in The Guardian gives a neat 'pen picture' of the organization's history, while the fact of its publication demonstrates that this North-West company has some status in the world of industry:

> *"Baxi Partnership claims 25 per cent of the UK gas heating appliance market, where volume is the key to profitability. It began life in 1866 when Richard Baxendale started a general iron foundry for local textile mills. It moved into domestic heating in 1935 and grew by some 300 per cent between 1960 and 1980, its expansion parallel to the natural gas market. By the mid 1980s another parallel emerged as the market slowed and diversified, increasing overheads, decreasing profits and sapping employee morale.*

*The company changed radically in 1983 when the ownership changed from the founding family to the employees, creating the Baxi Partnership. All employees became 'partners'."*

(Guardian, 27.1.93)

The 'partnership' idea is continually taken up within the company, and the impression we have gathered is that the concept is used by management to give a feeling - justified or not - of promoting an understanding and facilitative, employee-centred management style.

The two largest trades unions represented on site are MSF (Manufacturing Services & Finance) and the AEEU (Amalgamated Engineering and Electrical Union). Both unions are active in the Joint Shop Stewards Committee and the Education Committee.

## 2. Background to Setting up the Course

The initial idea of contacting Workbase Training to set up some basic skills training came in early 1989. Some of the Baxi Shop Stewards were on a Trades Union course at Preston College Trades Union Studies Section, and heard about Workbase's work from the tutors there. They felt that some of their members would benefit from increasing their basic communication skills. They wanted to increase opportunities for members to take up certificated training courses in order to be able to progress through the company, and realised that, for instance, computer literacy as well as a reasonable level of English and Maths were essential for some of these courses. In addition, since the advent of increasing use of secret ballots in Union votes, the written word was being used much more for instructions from the union to members, and one or two problems had been noted in these areas.

At around the same time that the Joint Shop Stewards Committtee was approaching Baxi management to discuss the idea of Workbase coming to the company, a Runshaw College development worker, who was visiting different companies in its 'catchment area', contacted the company discussing possible services the college could offer to companies, including Basic Skills training.

Partly because of the 'partnership' ethos of the company, in terms of not wanting to deny opportunities to the 'partners', the management agreed to go ahead and find out more about what a workplace basic skills training scheme organized by Workbase might have to offer.

## 3. Setting up the Courses

The Workbase Training Consultant, Stephanie Pordage, visited the company in April 1989, and gave a presentation to the Human Resources department, Trade Union representatives, and other staff representatives. From this presentation the Human Resources department put the case to the management for looking further at the plan, outlining the potential benefits of the scheme as follows:

*"The programme is designed to achieve the following goals: -*

- *improve job performance*
- *assist progression within the organization*
- *provide a forum for direct employment related training*
- *improve communications between Company and workforce*
- *improve motivation and quality of service*
- *provide an individual employee 'benefit'."*

(in-house memo, April 1989)

At this stage it was felt by both management and unions that there would be a relatively small number of workers who lacked basic skills in reading, writing and maths and who would be interested in the scheme, and what was envisaged was a relatively short-term scheme bringing a few people 'up to scratch'.

> *"I suspect that Work Base* [sic] *could create very little interest within the Company"*
>
> (ibid, memo from Human Resources department)

In May 1989, the Workbase consultant made a presentation to the Board. It was then agreed to go ahead with setting up a steering group and carrying out a Training Needs Analysis, with a view to going ahead with some courses.

*Training Needs*

In June 1989, presentations were made by the Workbase Consultant to a pilot sample of 200 'partners', chosen by taking every fifth name from within the company. The presentations were made to partners in groups of about 20, on the three sites where Baxi production was taking place at the time, over a period of a week. Each participant in this pilot selection of 'partners' was given the opportunity of a confidential interview, to discuss their own interest in basic communication skills training. These interviews were carried out by tutors from Preston and Runshaw colleges.

The Training Needs Analysis, as presented by Workbase Training to the management in their report, showed a level of interest in communications and basic skills training which was far

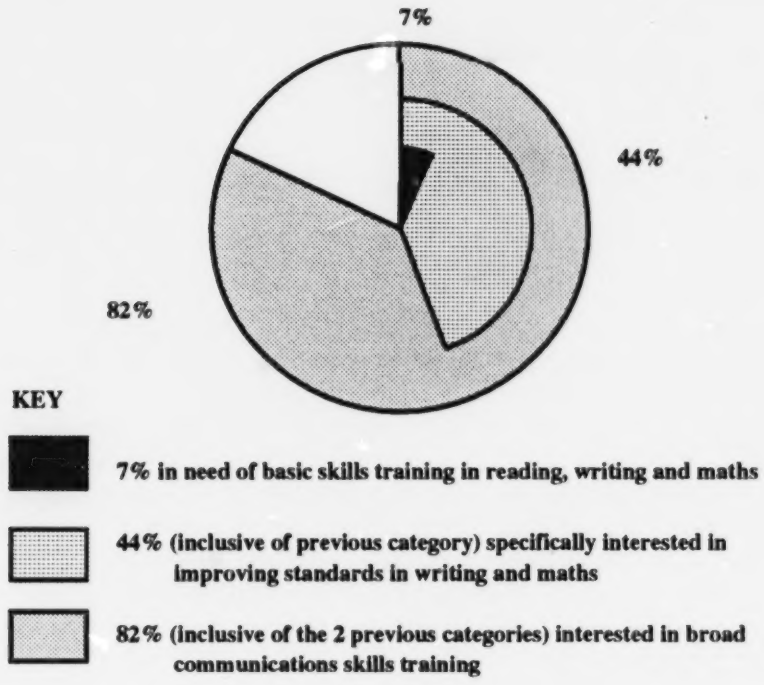

7%
44%
82%
KEY
7% in need of basic skills training in reading, writing and maths
44% (inclusive of previous category) specifically interested in improving standards in writing and maths
82% (inclusive of the 2 previous categories) interested in broad communications skills training

*Figure 7.1: Result of pilot training needs audit August 1989*

higher than was expected by management and unions. Of the 119 people who came forward to be interviewed:

| | |
|---|---|
| *7%* | *were in need of basic skills training in reading, writing and mathematics* |
| *44%* | *were specifically interested in improving standards in writing and mathematics, and* |
| *82%* | *were interested in broad communications skills training.* |

(internal memo, August 1990)

see Figure 7.1.

These findings pointed to a cost implication, communicated to the Board by the personnel management:

> *"if it is accepted that the sample group of 119 people is representative of the workforce as a whole, then it can be seen that meeting the skills needs identified above is a major task requiring long-term provision."*
>
> (internal memo, ibid)

Thus, even before the classes started, it can be seen that there was a realization that this was to be an ongoing issue, and that there was already a commitment to address it.

To respond to the needs identified in the Training Needs Analysis, it was decided to run pilot courses, in English, Mathematics and Metrication.

Before setting the courses up, Runshaw College spent some time in a period of research and preparation. During this time, the staff looked at the work requirements of the company and used them and other resources to prepare study materials, and to develop a range of materials for the courses. The time was also used to set up links between the college and the company, to devise systems for release, and to set up 'accessible and practical sites' in which classes could take place. (Baxi/Runshaw/Workbase, 1989).

In November 1989, the first, pilot series of classes was begun, in Foundation English (1 course of 100 hours), and Mathematics and Metrication (2 courses of 30 hours each). These were taught by Runshaw College tutors.

At the same time as developing the pilot courses, the Workbase consultant and the Runshaw College development worker put together a proposal for an Open Learning Centre, in order to respond to the more long term needs highlighted by the report. This was designed to provide an ongoing, permanent education site within the company, where students could meet and make use of learning resources provided within the centre.

This proposal was put to the Steering Group, and it was agreed to carry out a feasibility study, which would set out detailed costings for the centre. From this stage on, planning for the Open Learning Centre formed part of the plans for the overall project.

The pilot classes came to an end, and were followed by a further series of three classes in March 1990; one English class and two Metrication groups; and a third series, in English, Metrication and General Mathematics, followed. Some of the students who had started the pilot classes continued with the sessions, and in addition new students were included, who had expressed interest in joining the first series of classes at the time of the Training Needs Analysis. The courses continued through the summer, and were eventually publicised throughout the company, with a view to reaching as many partners as wanted to attend.

*Redundancies and the Open Learning Centre*

In 1990, and again in 1992, the company 'shed' some of its workforce. 90 people were made redundant in 1990. We were told that they were selected for various reasons, such as work record, attitude, and the like, in contrast to the old Union idea of 'last in, first out'. A postal ballot was held among the workforce to decide whether to take any action to oppose the redundancies. A motion for action short of strike action was passed, but overturned later on a show of hands at a mass meeting.

During the time that the redundancies were hanging over the company in 1990, attendance at the classes fell: the steering group heard that workers were concerned that the company would see that they were dispensible for a couple of hours one afternoon in the week - who was to stop the

company entirely dispensing with their services? In reality, the choice of who was to be made redundant had not been made with reference to attendance at the classes.

It took some time for confidence to trickle back to the 'partners', and for them to shake off the 'head down' attitude and return to the classes. The shop stewards worked hard at that time, and at other times when the numbers had dropped, to talk to the students and find out what their concerns were, and encourage a return to the classes.

*Open Learning Centre*

The Open Learning centre, in a converted room on Baxi's main Brownedge Road site, was officially opened in November 1990 with a press launch. Bernard O'Connell, principal of Runshaw College, was reported in the 'Preston Citizen' as saying

> *"over the next five years, the thrust of industry will be towards training commitments, and other firms will look at Baxi as a prime example and copy its training initiative."*
>
> (Preston Citizen, November 1990)

In the Open Learning Centre, regular English and Maths sessions are held, on a 'workshop' or independent study basis, with Runshaw College tutors in attendance for 18 hours a week. During this time, groups of students come in at set times and are given work by the tutors. They work individually at their own pace, with tutor support, or occasionally in small groups. Several students use the centre at other times, collecting and returning work set by the tutors.

In addition, European language classes and computing sessions take place in the centre, which is also used for training sessions for management and for secretarial staff.

**4. Finance**

The initial consultancy and Training Needs Analysis done for Baxi by Workbase Training were financed from special development funding which Workbase had available at that time for new projects. Once classes began, Baxi covered the college's basic costs for the classes. These costs were initially calculated at the basic hourly rate for Grade V tutors, plus the costs of tutors' travel, plus materials. After the first year, an element was built in to the hourly rate to cover some administrative costs from Runshaw, and a small amount of tutorial time has more recently been put aside for a tutor to spend time informally 'around the factory', giving guidance and counselling when required, and generally publicising the work of the Centre.

Initial costings for the Open Learning Centre were estimated in the original proposals at £15000 for the first year, not including the cost of converting rooms for the centre. These costs were to include tutorial time (a total of 18 hours per week - three tutors at six hours per week each - for 40 weeks), materials and equipment (open learning packs and computer software), publicity and marketing, and examination and accreditation fees, etc. In addition, in the end about £3500 was spent on converting and decorating the room: the work was all done in-house.

84

At the beginning of the scheme, in order to calculate the total cost of the courses, including loss of production during the time that students were at the classes, Baxi calculated an hourly rate for lost production from each student of £7.94. This was a nominal 1.3 times the 'Hourly Production Rate' of £5.96. Including the figure for lost production in the calculation of the costs of the scheme led to the management's decision to demand a commitment of one hour of a student's own time for each three hour training session, when the scheme was first launched.

The Open Learning centre initial proposals included a section on costs of loss of production: using the company's figure of £7.94, the report stated that *"if 40 partners attend for an average of 2 hrs p.w. throughout the 40 week 'term', the total lost production cost will be £25,408".*

It was these costings which led the management team to decide that even a one third/two third split was not enough, and a 50/50 split of 'own time/work time' would be necessary for training once the Open Learning centre was established. This situation is dealt with in more detail in Section 6, 'timing and release' below, and also in Chapter Twelve: 'Issues'.

In 1992, plans were drawn up for an adjoining room to be converted to a dedicated Information Technology centre, with four PCs: costs were forecast at £5000, to include heating, carpeting, and full disabled access, and this room was officially opened in April 1993, by Roy Harrison, head of Training Policy Group at the CBI.

**5. Expectations**

Laid out below are some of the expectations that all interested groups - the management, students, unions and the college tutors - had about the courses both before they started and as they were progressing. Other benefits of the scheme which Baxi found are included in Chapter Eleven: 'Benefits And Blocks'.

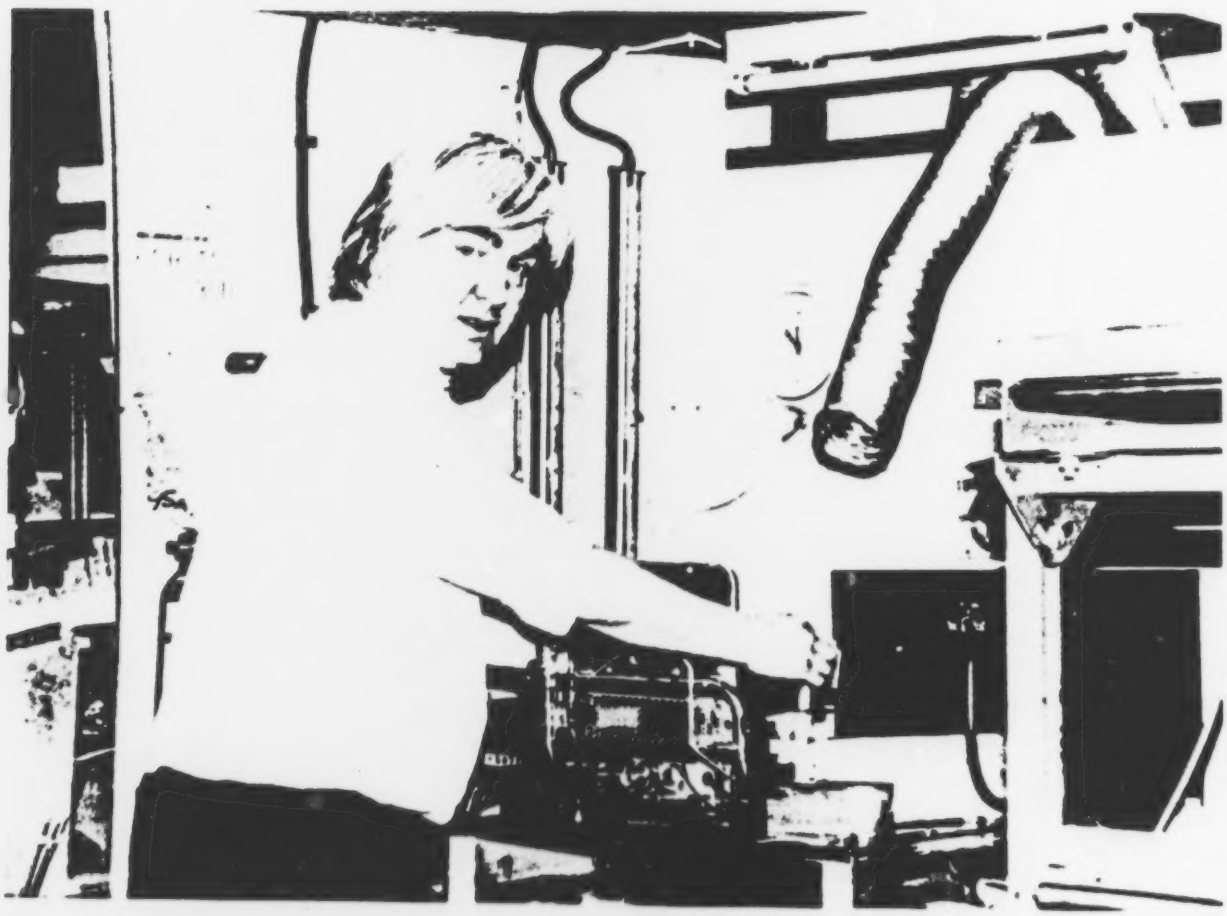
*The Management*

*New expectations, new skills*

Over the time that the scheme has been running, new working practices have been brought into the company; 'Continuous Improvement Teams' (CITs) involve the entire workforce in meetings to discuss suggestions for improving quality and methods of production. This has meant rotation of the minuting and chairing roles during meetings; new tasks for many of the staff, especially for shopfloor workers. In addition, the written word is used far more than in the past to put information over to the shop floor, both in newsletters, and on overheads and flipcharts during 'CIT' presentations. Under the 'Profit Improvement Programme', all employees are encouraged to put forward 'PIPs' to reduce costs and waste. All of these changes involve additional English, Maths and Communications core skills, and it is felt that the Open Learning Centre has contributed to their success.

*Take off your brain and come in!*

A cartoon drawn by one of the 'partners' and shown at the second 'Adult Learning At Work' seminar held at Baxi Heating in November 1992 shows a big, anonymous "Works Entrance" and a box just next to the gate, labelled "Leave Brain Here". The caption reads "For every pair of hands you pay for, the brain comes free. Make sure it's used".



This concept, of the time being past when you 'left your brain at the factory gate', was one which was talked about a lot at Baxi in relation to the Open Learning centre. All but one of the students we interviewed in a group discussion in June 1991 felt that they had definitely increased the amount that they used their brains at work.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

*"At one time we used to clock on and leave your head at the door, but now you need your brain at work."*

(Student in group discussion)

These new practices and new expectations of the workers by the management all demand a better command of basic communications skills from the workforce.

*From altruism ...*

At the time of the original Training Needs Analysis, the expectations of management of the benefits of the scheme were as laid out above in Section Two.

One manager told us that at that time:

*"The initial management expectations were to tackle the basic problems of literacy and numeracy, to help with paperwork inaccuracies on time sheets and so on. The emphasis was on benefits to the individual in an altruistic way to improve the quality of life."*

(Manager, June 1991)

*... to the 'bottom line'*

By the end of the life of the research project, however, the management were talking about real financial benefits which the company felt it was receiving from the scheme:

*"The fact that we've had this training has given all the employees in CIT teams the confidence and ability to analyse business problems. They would never have got involved without maths training. The CITs have helped to deliver cost savings which over the last 18 months have been quite substantial. It can't be proved that it's because of the scheme, but I feel it is, because it means everyone can go on board."*

(Manager, November 1992)

Some examples of 'PIPs', i.e. suggestions made by employees in the Profit Improvement Programme, are listed in Chapter Eleven: 'Benefits & Blocks'.

By November 1992, at the seminar mentioned above, the Human Resources manager was saying

*"The company didn't do this out of the goodness of its heart. It was to try to ensure that the workforce were prepared to change with the company to make it more competitive".*

(Human Resources Manager Nov 1992)

Over time, in contrast to attendance at the classes being seen as a 'deficiency' model, quite often promotion interviews within the company include questions about whether the applicant has taken any advantage of the Open Learning centre, more or less with the attitude of 'if not, why not'?

*Changing Job Design*

In addition to new working practices such as the Continuous Improvement Programme, other factors, too, led to increasing use of basic communications skills at Baxi during the time that the programme was being set up. These included changing job design, BS5750, computerisation, and new health and safety regulations. The Business Manager described these changes to us, taking up some of the issues described by some of the employers in Section Four: "The Employer Survey":

> *"In the engineering department the style was changing from a manual operation, putting parts in machines, to computer operations. Individuals have to use and understand technology. The best way to run business is multi-skilling and teamwork. We need broad based skills. One person has to do production control and computers, be numerate, handle his own maintenance, drive a fork lift truck and work with the setters up of machines.*
>
> *Everything is changing in the manufacturing environment. It's not just management; it goes right down to individuals. With BS5750 everybody lives and breathes quality. Computerisation and new technology impacts right down to every individual. In Health and Safety at Work, there are new COSHH regulations, and more to come. In technology the style is changing. Most companies diversify, which brings in new requirements for skills from the workforce."*

As this manager says, a decision has to be made when working practices are changing, whether to train the existing workforce or to take on an entirely new team. At Baxi, he tells us, the former idea was the norm:

> *"Some companies change their personnel in different ways by setting up a new site or manipulating redundancies and then recruiting in the future, but we've approached it in a different way. We train the people we've got."*

The concept of 'training people to accept change' was an important one to this manager.

> *"It's a development process. Things change and we must be able to adapt. It's very useful as a process of helping to change attitudes. It's not just English and Maths, but changing attitudes towards change, responsibilities and re-designing of jobs."*

The issue of training people to accept change, helping people to begin learning again, 'encouraging the learning culture', is examined in more detail in Chapter Twelve: 'Issues'.

*The Students*

We talked to students individually and in a group. Those students we talked to had been doing the classes for anything from a week to eighteen months. In our interviews with these students, they found it easier to talk about the benefits they had gained from the course than to look back

and think about their initial expectations. The benefits they felt they had gained fell into three main areas: their work life, their home and personal life, and, connected to both of these, their general education and their professional/career development.

*Education/career development*

The students we spoke to talked about how they hadn't done much education at school, or since school, and wanted to improve on their basic skills for all sorts of reasons.

> *"I thought I was behind a little bit. I sometimes pronounced words as I saw them instead of how they should be, and people would laugh. I didn't mind that, but I thought maybe I should brush up a little bit. ... With this coming to industry, it's been ideal for me to do, brush up a little bit."*

> *"I was under the opinion I was a weak speller and just wanted to brush up on what I missed out on at school."*

This student felt able to voice his secret ambitions, even in front of his fellow students and colleagues.

> *"I'm hoping to, it's always been a secret ambition, to maybe write a book, but with not being really brilliant at English, when I'm up to that standard, I'd love to be able to write a book. ... A novel type book. In a few years."*

One student in the group discussion talked about choosing a subject he felt he'd get on with OK initially.

> *"It's been so long since I've been in the classroom that I felt, well, I liked doing maths at school - to get me back into the classroom. I thought I'd do a subject I liked doing and maybe later on take other courses. It's been quite good."*

We also asked students if they had thought of taking up evening classes, before the scheme had come to Baxi. One student, who had been a butcher, and had run a pub in London, said:

> *"A few years ago I did, but I got married instead, and that was it."*

And another told us:

> *"I was working shifts, and never had time to go to night school."*

One student felt that it was more relaxed learning with a group of your work colleagues:

> *"At nightschool you meet different people. Here you're with people you work with, so you do feel at ease straight away. We're all in the same boat".*

One of the students we spoke to wanted to get to the same position as the time served workers in his section: he wanted to aim at some kind of skills training. Another was doing a college course and was using the centre for learning support:

> *"I'm doing CADCAM at Tuson College and this course helps. I had to write a seven page report. Sue went through it with me."*

*Working life*

Some students talked about the new ways of working, and how the 'CIT' teams had increased the amount of writing they had to do. Some students' jobs had changed, through promotion or otherwise, and they had different requirements which they were hoping to meet through the classes - for example improved report writing, better minute taking skills. This student had been off work for some years due to an accident, and was taking the classes in order to improve his basic skills and hopefully be able to do a job which contained more clerical work.

> *"The opportunity of this course is, when I'm at a fairly fit stage to my boss, I can go to him with pieces of paper to show him what I can and can't do, and therefore he'll be ... able to find me more work. Baxi has been good enough to take me back on, I have to give something back."*

Another student had particularly wanted to follow a work-related curriculum:

> *"I wanted business letters, notes, messages and proof reading. I've been promoted to audit quality control. I might as well take the opportunity and make it beneficial to the company, rather than take French, which I wouldn't use in the company. In my new job there's not a lot of report writing now but there will be later. You go on vendor visits and you have to write about what you've seen. Those reports go to my boss and it looks more professional. I might have filled in a time sheet before, but I hadn't done any education for 20 years - if you don't use it, you lose it!"*

This student was on two Continuous Improvement teams, and explains his role:

> *"There are seven members in the Quality team and ten members in the Production team. In the quality team, I discuss quality faults, I take notes and take them back to the production team. The team leader doesn't chair or take minutes necessarily, it rotates."*

Another student is less sure at using the written word, and talks about his increasing confidence:

> *"I don't need writing much in the working day, except for odd words, my personal sheet, putting it onto the timesheet. Now I'll have a try. I've got lots more confidence ... In time I'll take notes for meetings. If I could take the notes home and copy them out, I'd be OK doing them now."*

*Home life*

Students felt that they could find benefits from within the courses for their work and their home lives.

> *"I think it helps you both in work and outside"*
>
> *"It's a two-sided coin. There's no two ways about it."*
>
> *"Instead of looking dumb to the little one, maybe I'm not so bad after all"*
>
> *"Children like mine, they're at the big school. He's just 13 going on 14 and they're doing Maths that I never even did at school, so hopefully that will help them later on".*
>
> *"I have a six year old son, and I've been writing back to him. It's nice to write to him. The letters would have been few and far between. Now I have more confidence with writing and spelling."*

*The Unions*

We interviewed two shop stewards who had both been involved in the scheme as steering committee members, one of whom had also been a student. The main points of this interview have been written up elsewhere (RAPAL, 1992). They talked about the potential benefits of the scheme in relation to team-working:

> *"If management are going to take us along to meetings, briefs, team meetings, and involve everybody, then there could be a problem with people on the shop floor. ... it's pointless taking us along to these meetings, because people are just going to sleep in them. ... If you're giving self empowerment to people and you're saying we want to do this and that and the other ... you've got a certain section of the workforce that can never take part, because they don't have the capability or the confidence to do it..."*

But they also talked about other expectations that they had for the courses; that of workers' gaining their right to a basic education which they might have missed out on in school:

> *"But the education wasn't set up specifically to enhance team work. I think we identify the need for people to have the basic education that they've missed. ... The company was going to get some benefit as well as the individuals getting the benefit. ... Basic English and Maths are two of the things you've got to get right straight away. ... If you can't read or write properly you can't do simple arithmetic to work out your pay slips or your bonuses or your overtime hours or anything like that. ... I mean, I work with guys, for years I've filled time-sheets out, I've helped guys work their time out, helped them work their wages out and one thing and another, and I knew they had a problem, but there's nothing you can do about it.*

*When these courses come up, we can say to them guys 'Look, we can try to get this for you'."*

They also talked about the importance of workers becoming more fulfilled and gaining something for themselves:

*"You do it solely for the benefit of that person who wants to get an education out of it, and once that person's got the education that that person wants, not what we want as trade unionists and not what Baxi wants as management, if that person is quite happy that now* [they] *can sit down and write a letter to their grandchildren, or* [they] *can play on a computer with their grandchild: ... if they are happy with that, then they are a happier person in life, so you've got a happier workforce."*

In addition, there was an element of getting more people trained to take part in Union activities:

*"We have now got more trade union reps who have been on these courses who can now stand up at meetings and can participate in meetings. "*

**6. Timing and Release**

Before the initial Training Needs Analysis (TNA) was carried out in June 1989, as mentioned above, it was felt by both management and unions that there would be a relatively small number of workers who lacked basic skills in reading, writing and maths and who would be interested in the scheme. It was envisaged that the training would take place wholly in work time.

Once the TNA had taken place, and it was realised that in fact the company was possibly looking at a large commitment in terms of time and cost, the management decided that instead of the courses taking place entirely in work time, a commitment of one hour of a student's own time to two hours of the company's time would be required from participants. This was opposed by the Trades Union representatives on the Steering Committee who felt strongly that the whole of the training should take place in work time, in the same way as did, for example, training for managers and skills training for new machinery. The management were not prepared to negotiate on this issue.

This situation was set out very clearly to students embarking on the first pilot courses, November 1989. In the pre-class interviews, prospective students were offered the choice of not taking up classes if they did not wish to put in half an hour of their own time twice a week into the two one-and-a-half hour classes offered. In the event, none of the students interviewed objected to putting their own time in to the classes.

The classes were held to coincide with the last hour of shifts. There were some problems with this timing, as shop floor workers reported being tired at the end of the working day; however the end of the day was more appreciated by office workers.

Plans for the Open Learning Centre, eventually opened in October 1990, were being drawn up at this time. Despite the unions continuing to support the line that all training should be entirely in company time, the management included in the proposals a clause that there should be a 50/50

split for shop-floor workers training in the Open Learning centre, with courses being half in workers' own time, half in company time. As this was the wish of the students, mostly union members, the Unions decided to go along with the proposal rather than risk losing the whole package.

In 1991, the Open Learning Centre was staffed by Runshaw College staff on four days a week, between 11.00 a.m. and 12.30 p.m., and between 2.30 and 5.30 p.m. In addition it was open on some evenings. Students would log in when they used the centre, and were expected to put in an hour of their own time for every hour they use the centre in the company's time.

In practice, some of the students do this second hour of studying as homework.

> *"I've made reasonable progress in the amount of time. I do one hour in the firm's time, one hour in my own time, which I usually do as homework. The more time you put in, the more you'll learn."*
>
> (Student)

Baxi is often asked to speak at conferences and seminars about the scheme, and the Human Resources manager always suggests to others thinking of setting up such a scheme that they

> *"try to negotiate a shared time arrangement", as ... "it cuts cost, confirms commitment from employees and helps to achieve acceptance from non-participants".*
>
> (H.R. manager, Seminar, November 1992)

*New ways of working*

Since the introduction of Continuous Improvement Teams at Baxi in 1990, the culture in the company has changed a great deal. By 1991 the Human Resources manager was telling us that loss of production might not be as much of an issue as it was:

> *"With teamworking, it isn't as realistic as it was to talk about loss of production time as being a cost of the courses. Workers and teams make up targets by doing extra work before going off, to a great extent, to avoid loss of performance-related earnings."*

Students talking about getting away from their teams to go to classes painted a slightly different picture:

> *"Well, I personally face more problems from the people I'm working with rather than management. Working in a team environment, it puts the onus on a team - not to carry the person that's going, but it alters the targets for the day - a lot of changing, people moving about, to compensate for the person that's leaving. So yes, I face a lot of flak for it. They've got used to it now, but for a while ..."*

The issue of release, cover and timing is examined further in Chapter Twelve: 'Issues'.

## 7. The Curriculum, Teaching Style and Learning Environment

*The curriculum*

From the start, the groups have consisted of about 11 or 12 students, with one or sometimes two tutors to a session. Often the students will work in pairs, or on their own, at their own pace. At first the course content was loosely based on requirements at work: hence the Metrication course involved measurement of components from, and on, the factory floor. One of the very first English classes, with the college's Outreach Worker, included working on the word 'Partnership' - seeing how many other words could be formed out of its letters. Rules for spelling, layout and punctuation were covered.

As the scheme progressed, each new student would have a chance to discuss his or her own individual requirements with a Runshaw tutor, and an individual programme would be worked out for that student.

> *"She's got the case notes, if you will, from each individual that comes to her class. When she sits down she'll say to them: 'Right, we'll start. You say you have a problem writing reports' - so she'll give you something to give you more practice in, say, essay writing. Somebody might come in, they might want to learn to read better, so you would start with, I would imagine, the simpler reading material that's available, but she will structure the course within that English block to tailor it to the individual, it'll not be: 'Right, you want to learn to write, you want to do this, that and the other, you all start at the same place'. It doesn't work like that. It's the same with the Maths course."*
>
> (Shop Steward/Steering Group member)

Particularly after the Open College of the North West 'FAME' accreditation system was introduced, students would bring in work which they wanted assistance with. At a steering committee meeting, one of the tutors, who had been involved in the scheme from the beginning, described a session which she had found particularly rewarding:

> *"There was someone having back-up with his Maths A Level for electronics, which he was doing at college; one having help with basic maths; one doing GCSE; one analysing a DH Lawrence poem. I left that class buzzing. That's why I'm in the job I'm in. People working at completely different things, all together, with benefits for their personal, work, and educational life."*
>
> (Tutor)

Since teamworking had been introduced in the company in 1990, Runshaw College staff had been looking at the idea of running training sessions for individual teams, initially on a pilot basis, in minute taking and other topics related to discussion groups. They have also been dealing with note taking and minute taking within the group sessions: directly related to the Continuous Improvement Teams and also, of course, relevant for Trade Union participation.

*Learning environment*

Before the purpose-converted Open Learning centre was available, the classes took place in different rooms when they were free, around the production areas. As mentioned above, one room used was glass-walled, in the middle of one of the production areas, giving the students very much the feeling of being in a goldfish bowl. One class used the Boardroom one week, which felt very plush to them.

Problems which arose from this situation were

a) that the tutors, most of whom travelled by bus, had nowhere to keep materials on site, so that students only had access to a limited amount of resources at each session - and the tutors' arms grew longer by the week;

b) that the students were still 'on the shop floor' while they were at class, so they did not have a feeling of being away from work while they were learning. The 'goldfish bowl' syndrome worked in two ways; as well as workmates being able to see *into* the classes, the students were aware of what was going on outside the room.

The Open Learning Centre provided a solution to these problems, having its own resources cupboards, which were available to students at all times, and being tucked away down a passage, near the surgery but away from the production sites.

*The Open Learning Centre*

The Open Learning Centre was designed to cater for groups and for private study. It is clean and brightly decorated, with colour-coordinated carpet, paintwork and even wastebins. It has moveable tables and chairs, which can be put all together or separated off, and free-standing screens and booths. This gives students a choice of activity.

> *"First I sat on separate tables. Now I sit with the group."*
> (Student)

At one stage the moveability of the tables caused a problem, but this was highlighted by a survey the shop stewards carried out to find out why attendance had dropped off in late 1991:

> *"We were supposed to be having a private area and a quiet area, and little individual work booths, and they were disappearing and more tables were appearing. But you don't realise, it's only when somebody says 'I've stopped going 'cos there's no privacy any more' ..."*
> (Shop stewards)

Originally two computers were donated to the Centre: in 1992 three more were purchased. They are used by the Runshaw classes for basic computing - the RSA 'CLAIT' (Computer Literacy and Information Technology) certificate is now offered at the centre. In addition there is an interactive video machine which is used for management courses, and the centre is also used for

word-processing improvers classes, run by Baxi secretarial staff, and for other classes run by Runshaw (see 'Other college-company links'.)

One problem with the centre was that it was converted from one half of a shower block, and the other half was still used by the partners for showers: several students - and tutors - reported being disturbed by the bad language coming through the thin walls when people were getting changed!

In addition, students were reporting disturbances from other groups using the video or the computers during the 'Runshaw' classes.

> *"It's offputting if the management is there teaching on the computers. If four people are here working, but there's six behind on the computers, it's off-putting."*
> (Student)

These problems were remedied in 1992, when after approaching several funding bodies without success, Baxi management agreed to cover the costs of converting the second half of the shower block into a second Open Learning room (mentioned above under 'Finance'). This room is now used for computing and interactive video sessions, leaving the first room free for other groups.

A problem with the site, not yet resolved, is that Baxi Heating production takes place on more than one site. Students who don't work at Brownedge Road, the main site where the Open Learning centre is situated have further to travel: it can take those students an extra half an hour to clean up and arrive at the centre, and several have said that they would like classes nearer to their work.

> *"Moving from site to site is a problem. An hour in the room is OK, but an extra half an hour travelling takes time away from the team. I'm given the time off OK, but I don't want to leave the team for so long."*

> *"If there was more demand, we could have a learning centre on each site with ten people here and ten on the other two sites."*

> *"Last year I was at the foundry. It was further to come. I needed a shower first so the hour would have taken two hours with travel time. Now it's just next door to where I work. It takes five minutes. It's more convenient."*

## 8. Accreditation

Students were offered the choice of taking the Open College of the North-West FAME (Foundation Accreditation Maths and English) certificates during the courses. Some were also registered for GCSEs, and some chose not to do any certification programmes. FAME is a competence-based assessment system, so students could use different types of work to be assessed on.

> *"We do the FAME, Foundation Accreditation Maths and English, and it's levels one to four. You start at level one, you're starting at the basics. If you want to do level one and finish at level one, that's great. You don't need to do accreditation if*

*you don't want it. You don't have to follow it through to level four, you don't have to sit any exams. We want to ... treat them as adults, not as kids. It's a rolling course, if you miss a couple of weeks you can come back, you can start again, you can pick it up again."*

(Shop Steward/Steering Committee member)

Those who did take the FAME programmes found them stimulating:

*"I was offered GCSE and FAME and I was told that I'd find FAME more interesting. I'm doing my own project on fishing and I'm writing letters and talking to people for it.... I'd have laughed if six months ago anyone would have told me I'd have done the amount of work I have done on my project. I'm really pleased with myself."*

After we had finished interviewing that student, he interviewed us about the 'Adult Learning At Work' project, for the section in the accreditation on 'Finding out information from other people'.

As FAME is based on competency statements it was possible for students to choose the types of work they did within each competency. So the student we have just heard from did a project on fishing; another student, also quoted above, felt he wanted a much more work-related curriculum:

*"I've got a choice. I'm doing FAME. Sue wants me to do creative stuff but I've steered it back to the business stuff."*

As mentioned above, the certification was used for publicity, with the 'Baxi Partner' featuring photographs of "the first group of graduates from the Open Learning Centre" being presented with their certificates on completion of their course by the then Chief Executive, David Dry.

## 9. What's in a Name - Publicizing and Filling the Courses: Issues of Confidentiality and Sensitivity

Students for the first pilot courses were selected, by Runshaw College, from the people who showed interest in the Training Needs Analysis interviews. There were many more students interested than there were places on the first course, and it was thought that it would have been a good idea just to involve students from one particular production area in the initial publicity of the scheme. As it was, students from every area of the company were involved in the pilot, which aroused more interest. Those partners who took part in the initial TNA and were unsuccessful in getting on to the pilot courses in Autumn 1989 were offered places on the courses run at Easter 1990, though not all attended: the momentum might have been lost with such a long gap between the application and the courses starting. After the Easter round of courses, publicity was extended throughout the company, by notices around the company and in wage packets, and the next round of courses was open to everyone.

Since the Open Learning Centre opened, posters publicising courses run in it are displayed on notice boards around the company, with information about courses available and where to go to ask for more details. In addition, articles about the centre appear regularly in the Company's glossy magazine "The Partner", including, for example, in the March 1992 issue, photographs of

students being awarded their Open College of the North West FAME certificates, together with an interview with the Personnel and Training Officer. She is quoted as saying:

> *"Our most valuable resource is our people and our prime concern is their self development through training and education. At the same time the need for effective literacy and numeracy skills in the workplace is essential, and Baxi are endeavouring to fulfil these present needs to meet the challenge of our future in Europe."*

In the same issue of "The Partner" there is an article by Jim Rowley, then MSF Shop Steward, Steering Committee member, and an Open Learning Centre student himself. He writes:

> *"British workers are frequently portrayed as badly educated, poorly skilled and undertrained and, as the patterns of work change with fewer unskilled jobs available, the need for effective literacy and numeracy skills in the workplace is essential.*
>
> *If someone is unable to read or write with confidence they are disadvantaged in the workplace - and the workforce of the future. The higher skills and qualifications they require to enrich their lives will be out of their reach.*
>
> *This is not the case at Baxi, and as Trade Unionists we should congratulate everyone concerned for being far sighted enough to rise to this need and introduce Educational Training as well as skills training into the workplace.*
>
> *Other workplaces are not as forward thinking as us, so as Trade Unionists we need to go out and convey this principle to others less informed or fortunate as ourselves."*

From the beginning of the scheme, in 1989, the Basic Communications course was known as 'Foundation English'. Throughout, there was an emphasis on confidentiality, and words such as 'literacy', 'numeracy', 'basic education' were avoided in the publicity. The scheme was known by everyone as 'Workbase' up to the time that the Open Learning Centre was opened. At this time, the 'Workbase' name, which is a registered trademark of Workbase Training Limited, was replaced by 'The Open Learning Centre'.

Whatever the name used, there were still some problems with attitudes from the shop floor and from some supervisors.

Before the purpose-built Open Learning centre was launched, some of the classes took place in a glass-windowed room in the centre of one of the production areas, as mentioned above: this led to the students' feeling very exposed to the shop floor. Blinds were eventually used, but the 'goldfish bowl' situation meant that the students had to be very confident of themselves to continue the classes in that setting.

An article published in The Observer at the end of 1989 included easily recognizable photographs of some of the students, and commentary which led to some name-calling among the workforce. It was after this event that the steering committee made a decision that press coverage should not

be sought for the scheme, and that all interviews - with reporters and researchers - should have an assurance of confidentiality.

The launching of the Open Learning centre, out of the way from the main production site, tucked in behind the surgery, did not remove the 'stigma' from the classes - colleagues would talk about students going to the 'Early Learning Centre' and present them with Early Learning Centre carrier bags.

> *"They say you're going to kindergarten, or you're going to playschool. I take it with a pinch of salt. I laughed at them. It's to my advantage. I took the choice. ... they call the Open Learning Centre the Early Learning Centre, or the Cabbage Patch Kids."*
>
> (Student, June 1991).

A fall-off in numbers in 1991 seemed to have been partly due to a change in the procedure of registering for classes, where students thought they had to put their names forward to the Human Resources Department, which, while presenting no problems to French and Word processing students, may have been off-putting to some potential participants in basic education. The Union representatives spent some time reassuring people that this is not the case. The numbers picked up and new notices were put up saying that students should go straight to the Runshaw tutor.

This issue, of 'stigma' and attitudes from workmates, is looked at again in Chapter Twelve: 'Issues'.

**10. Evaluation, Measuring and Monitoring**

The scheme at Baxi has been continually monitored by the Steering Committee, which consists of members of the Human Resources department, a team leader, trades union representatives, students and a Runshaw College tutor. The committee meets regularly, about every eight to ten weeks. Issues are raised at the meeting such as publicity, introduction of new courses, feedback on current courses, and plans for presentation of certificates. Problems are aired and solutions put forward.

> *"Now what we do as a body; there's three of us from the unions who sit on the steering committee, plus the four students, plus the HR, two from HR and one from the management team, one of the team leaders, and we've all got an equal input in that, so there's no one side every really who has the pull/clout, who says we've got to go this way. It's got to be talked out, and we're there to make sure the people we represent are getting what they're asking for, and the students are there to make sure that if there is anything wrong with the courses, they can feed back and say 'yes, this is the problem with this course'. It's not everybody watching everybody else, it's just the representation is right".*
>
> (Shop stewards, January 1992)

Evaluation questionnaires are routinely issued to students completing courses by the tutors, and the results of these questionnaires are brought to the Steering Committee.

In addition, between meetings, the Runshaw tutors communicate directly with the Human Resources department on financial and some other issues.

## 11. Progression: Where to Next?

There is now a larger programme of classes going on in and around the Open Learning Centre, including Computing, French, German and Mathematics GCSE.

Several of the Open Learning Centre students took up college evening classes in 1991-1992, and used the Centre for back-up 'learning support'; for help with planning essays, etc. In early 1992, negotiations began with CeLBIC, the business arm of Runshaw college, and LAWTEC, on a 'package' whereby Runshaw would provide most of Baxi's in-house training requirements, and every Baxi partner would have a chance to enrol for at least one evening class in 1992-1993 at the college, with fees covered for them. By September 1992 this 'voucher system' was in place, and ten per cent of the workforce had signed up for evening classes at Runshaw College ranging from gardening to electronics, sponsored by the company.

> *"The basic concept when we first started was Basic English and Basic Maths, that's the first two courses they started. Now, then, from little acorns ..."*
> (Shop stewards)

## 12. Other College-Company Links

CeLBIC has been able to use the good links established with the company through the steady development of the basic skills programme over 3 years to develop new ways of working with the company, and is now working with Baxi and assuring most of its in-house training in vocational areas. Support has been received for this programme, linked in with the 'voucher scheme' described above, from LAWTEC, Lancashire Area West Training and Enterprise Council.

**Case No. 3: Baxi Heating. Timetable**

April 1989: First meeting between Management, Union Representatives, and Workbase

May 1989: Board and Management agree to start the project

June 1989: Presentations to a random sample of 200 employees : formation of Steering Committee

July 1989: 120 employees interviewed to identify training needs. Report given by Workbase to Company outlining training needs and recommending courses in English, Maths, Metrication

August - October 1989: Development of Pilot Courses

November 1989: First 3 courses start: Maths, English, Metrication

January 1990: Steering Committee proposal to establish an Open Learning Centre approved by the Board

March 1990: Second round of courses start: English and Metrication

May 1990: Third round of courses start: Maths, English and Metrication

May 1990: Work starts on Open Learning Centre

October 1990: Formal opening of Open Learning Centre

January 1991: Programme continues with English and Maths workshops, and in addition Basic Computer Awareness

April 1991: Introduction of French language course

January 1992: Introduction of German language course, plus further Basic Computer courses

April 1992: Negotiations begin with CeLBIC (the business arm of Runshaw College) and with LAWTEC (Lancashire Area West Training and Enterprise Council) for CeLBIC to take on more of Baxi's training

September 1992: 'Voucher system' in place: 10% of workforce sign up for evening classes at Runshaw College ranging from gardening to electronics, sponsored by the company. CeLBIC's role as trainer in other departments confirmed, with LAWTEC support.

December 1992: New extension to the Open Learning centre completed: a 2nd training room dedicated to information technology.

# Chapter Eight

## Other Models of Workplace Communications Skills - and Other - Training

---

While carrying out this research, we have come across other models for workplace communications skills training as well as the 'Workbase Training' approach as described above. The three models below show how communications skills support has been provided within a small business; how the education department of a working prison provided communications skills support in the practical skills workshops, and how a large city council provides a special training course for its non-managerial workers. In addition, there is a fourth account, of how a local manufacturing outlet of an multi-national corporation provided 'education for redundancy', for its whole workforce, in partnership with the local college.

### 1. Fleetwood Funeral Home

The Initial Training Manager for Youth and Adult Training at Beneast Training Agency, a private training agency in Blackpool, contacted the research associate in 1991. As well as discussing developments in basic skills support with TEC-sponsored Youth and Adult Training schemes, she felt that we might be interested in the links that Beneast had developed with employers, where they were running some basic skills support schemes on a part-time basis with adults actually in employment. We were invited to visit Fleetwood Funeral Home, to discuss their training experiences with the proprietor: the following account is based on our discussions with her and with Beneast.

At the time of our interview, Fleetwood Funeral Home was a small company, run by a sole trader, and employing 8 staff, both full and part time. The proprietor was very committed to providing training and opportunities for her staff, both to provide career development for them as individuals, and with a view to their being able to cover for each other and for her. In her particular area of work, the owner sees a lot of cases of small businesses having to be sold immediately on the death of the owner. This is more apparent in cases where there has been an inability or unwillingness to train staff up to have an overall knowledge of the business.

The tasks in the funeral directing business are very varied: ranging from manual work - e.g. putting handles on coffins, and pallbearing, and counselling - e.g. dealing with families in times of stress - to administrative tasks - e.g. dealing with paperwork related to death certificates, coroners, solicitors, etc, and writing obituary notices, as well as the routine accounting, etc., involved in running any small business.

A new junior staff member had been taken on, who showed great promise in some aspects of the work, but who had difficulties in the writing and spelling which would be necessary if he was to play a full part in the company. The proprietor discussed these difficulties with him, and it was decided that she would look for a suitable class for him to attend during work time, at the company's expense.

There was already a link existing between this company and Beneast: one of the Beneast staff regularly visited the company in connection with the National Association of Funeral Directors certification scheme. On his subsequent visit the proprietor raised the matter with him. He suggested that Beneast's Initial Training Manager visit the company to meet the worker. This took place shortly afterwards, and it was then arranged for the worker to attend regular classes at Beneast from the next morning.

This was a most satisfactory link that worked well, until the worker left the company suddenly without notice. This did not at the time change the proprietor's attitude to training in general; she remained committed to this kind of training in principle.

**2. Garth Prison**

This is a Category B Training prison in Leyland, Lancashire, with room for 512 prisoners. We visited its Education Department in June 1991, and discussed the 'Workshop Support Initiative' with the Basic Education Coordinator, Chris Johnston. The following is based on these discussions and draws particularly on the Evaluation report prepared in March 1991 by the Basic Education Coordinator together with the other Education staff involved in the initiative.

Four-fifths of HM Garth's population is employed in vocational skills workshops, which include Painting and Decorating, Bricklaying, Plastering, Weavers, Tailors, and Mechanics. The men who attend the workshops have no daytime access to education, and it was decided by the Education Department to pilot an initiative whereby the basic education staff would offer vocationally based basic skills support, on a part-time basis, to those men on the workshops who were interested in this type of learning, both on the workshop sites, and in a classroom in the education department for those men given leave to attend from workshops.

The scheme ran for one full term as a pilot, with one two hour session of language support (ESOL) and one two hour and one three hour session of basic skills support running each week, in the Motor Mechanics and Horticultural Mechanics departments.

The education staff involved felt that the initiative was a valuable addition to the inmates' working day. They also felt that the men looked forward to the sessions, and became used to the education staff being in the workshops.

*Advantages*

The advantages of the initiative as perceived by the education staff are listed in the evaluation report and I feel it would be useful to reproduce these here in full:

- *"- it provides vocationally-based basic skills in a work context*
- *it allows for the provision of student-centred learning, both practical and theoretical, in an integrated format*
- *it relieves some of the 'rooming' pressure from the education department*
- *it cements good relationships between workshops' staff and education staff*
- *it takes some of the theory teaching load off workshop instructors*

- *it consolidates the expertise of both instructor and basic skills tutor*
- *it prevents duplication of effort and uses time and resources more effectively*
- *both practitioners benefit from the other's subject expertise"*

(Johnston, c 1991)

*Disadvantages*

The disadvantages listed in the report are summarized below. In the evaluation, it is recognised that these are *"not necessarily disadvantages of the scheme, rather that they represent the operational problems experienced within the institution, at the time of the piloting .....* [and could be] *overcome, with continued effort on both sides."*

- instructors in some workshops found it difficult to reconcile themselves to the value of education support.
- the regime puts great pressure on production workshop staff to meet production targets: this makes release for inmates on production tasks particularly difficult: and consequently student numbers were often too low to be maintained.
- ESOL students decreased in number during the life of the initiative, due to releases and transfers to other establishments.
- education is sometimes seen as a 'soft option' and a low priority for non-education staff.
- some instructors felt that education staff were trying to 'take over'.
- the stigma of 'basic education' put off some potential students, and *'education is not very good 'image-wise', with peers'.*
- some workshops, because of machine noise, were unsuitable as learning atmospheres.

The education department feels that the positive elements of the initiative greatly outweigh the negatives, and recommends that in line with the Woolf Report, workplace based education remains a priority for prison education.

**3. Take Ten: Sheffield City Council Paid Educational Leave scheme**

This scheme was outlined in Jane Mace and Malcolm Yarnit's book on Paid Educational Leave 'Time Off To Learn' (Mace & Yarnit, 1987). Jane Mace suggested that we contact the scheme to see how it had developed over the intervening years.

We got in touch with the project and were invited to visit in April 1991. We had the opportunity of sitting in a Take Ten students' session on the first afternoon, talking to students during the breaks, and then returning the next day when we were able to have a long discussion with the project workers, and take away some evaluation documentation about the project.

In addition we met some Take Ten students when we ran our residential weekends for workplace learning students in April and December 1992.

The following very brief description of the scheme is based on our visit, the Time Off to Learn chapter in Take Ten, and on the words of the students we met on our weekends. It has been revised (May 1993) by Graham Birkin, Take Ten.

*Take Ten: The Scheme*

Based on a joint council-union agreement dating from 1983, all workers in Sheffield City Council has the right to ten days of Paid Educational Leave (P.E.L.) during their service. Priority goes to manual workers, and women in 'non-professional' jobs. This is in addition to other opportunities for training, e.g. Trade Union studies and vocational courses. It was also agreed that cover should be provided for workers who attended courses.

The aims and philosophy behind the scheme are of wanting to encourage people to be more assertive and articulate at work, to think about the effective delivery of service, and to take steps to make changes - at work, in the community and at a personal level. Various collections of student writing have been published, including one publication, 'The Changing Face of Sheffield's East End', which came out of an evening class looking at the decline of Sheffield's steel industry.

On the afternoon that we attended the course, 21 students, mainly women, from different Council departments, had just returned from looking round the foundation stages of a UK Housing Trust/Council housing development. They had been asking the architect on the site various questions about the plans for the development, and taking notes.

As well as a discussion about the plans for the site, the afternoon included some brainstorming and some tutor input on techniques for note-taking. There was also a session in small groups where the students looked at a diagram of the council structure, and worked out where they fitted in on the diagram, and which 'programme committees' of the council their department was answerable to: this was part of the preparation for the visit to the Council which was planned for the next week. The final session looked at options for project work to be undertaken further on in the course: handouts had been prepared on different topics which the students could choose to work on, and there was a brief discussion of the various ideas with the three tutors.

The atmosphere throughout was one of real excitement and 'buzzing': the time went very quickly and students were almost reluctant to stop at teabreak: everyone joined in the discussions, and those students who we talked to over coffee felt that they were getting a lot out of the course, and appreciated the Council's role in setting them up.

The scheme in 1991 was running very much on the same lines as in its initial stages and as described in 'Time Off To Learn', with three of the original four workers still in post. It was, however, beginning to feel a general 'squeeze' on training throughout the Council. As well as direct cuts to the Project budget, which would affect development and recruitment work, the 'squeeze' was having an effect on release for workers from the different departments, for various reasons, including the fact that cover was not so easy to arrange. By 1992, the situation was more difficult. This was partly due to compulsory competitive tendering; even when a Council department did win a tender, it had to provide the same service for less resources, so non-vocational (ie non job-specific) training and cover were often left off the budget.

Although there is a 'study skills' element in the course, with note-taking and writing being addressed as part of other work, basic skills is not a main theme of the scheme. Anyone applying to take part in Take Ten who had basic skills needs would be welcomed on to the course

and also encouraged to take up other specific literacy/numeracy courses, outside of work time. Take Ten has also run courses for individual council departments on job-related literacy issues. Currently (Spring 1993) they are running a 'Dealing with the Paperwork' course for care assistants in old people's homes.

Despite its not being a straight basic communications skills training course, we have included the 'Take Ten' scheme in this section as it is very much a 'training and education opportunity for manual workers', in the same way as the three main Case Study cases above. Take Ten courses lead to accreditation through the South Yorkshire Open College, and depending on students' support from their places of work, it is possible to use the courses as 'stepping-stones' to provide access onto other, vocational or non-vocational, training programmes. Some women students, for example, have gone on to a women's Access to Higher Education course, with release for one day a week for two years.

**4. Brooke Bond OXO**

Brooke Bond Oxo was a family firm, based in Great Harwood, Lancashire, established in 1940, manufacturing Oxo stock cubes to a traditional, 'secret recipe'. In 1984 the company was taken over by Unilever.


BEST COPY AVAILABLE

The factory was the main employer in Great Harwood, employing many parents and children, husbands and wives from the same families. Different shift times catered for different types of worker: in addition to full-time workers on day and night shifts, the 'twilight' shift mainly employed women with pre-school or school-age children.

The building where the production took place was an old one, and it had always been understood that it would have to be replaced at some stage. However, it came as a surprise to the workforce when they were called together in January 1990 and told that the factory was to close down three years later, and that production was to move to Worksop, as they had assumed that the new factory would still be in Lancashire.

The management had made the decision to give the workforce as long a notice of their impending redundancy as possible, in order that they could best prepare themselves for the future. Part of this preparation included individual interviews for each member of the workforce, with a member of the management, when they could talk through ideas for their future, including discussing their educational and training needs.

Using tutors from Accrington and Rossendale College, courses were run on-site in CV writing and jobseeking skills. In addition, the company paid for workers to attend classes in English, Mathematics, Languages and other, clearly vocational, areas such as care and hairdressing courses, at the local college, in their own time.

At the time of the closure, there were 375 employees at Brook Bond Oxo. Over the time that the scheme was in operation, nearly all of the workforce took part in at least one of the programmed activities: the CV writing course and pre-retirement counselling were particularly popular. In addition, around 60% of the workforce took up some other kind of training option, other on site or at the local college. The company covered the full cost of the courses taken before the closure, and in addition paid examination fees and allowed students time off work for exams. After the factory closed, in December 1992, the college organised some full-time courses, starting in January 1993, for some of the students to carry on with their learning.

Jean Hewitt, a former process worker at Brooke Bond, gives a worker's viewpoint of the scheme in 'Not Just A Number'. We have chosen to reproduce the whole article, because we feel that Jean's writing, and in particular the conclusion she draws in her last paragraph, deserve as wide an audience as possible.

**A Chance to Work**

I began working for Brooke Bond Foods seventeen years ago as a part-time machinist, making Oxo cubes. This was four evenings a week. This fitted in very well with my family commitments. Then as my daughter grew older I transferred to days as this seemed easier rather than looking for another job.

However, two years ago all the workers (about 400 people) were called into the cantéen and we were informed that the factory would be moving to Worksop in 1992, and that we would all be made redundant. This news was met by a wall of silence as people tried to take in the fact.

This, obviously, made me think seriously about my future. I had to face the idea of starting over again at 45; not by choice, but being forced into it and knowing that employers wanted younger more qualified staff.

I at least had had previous experience both in applying for jobs and doing different types of work; many of my colleagues had only ever worked for Brooke Bond Foods. Some had started straight from school on the recommendation of a relative and had never written a C.V. or application letter.

I decided to enrol for evening classes and as I had previously worked in an office I chose word processing and English GCSE. The firm then informed us that they would pay the fees for anyone taking courses which would help them with any future careers. They also had interviews with each member of staff to try and sort out what kind of work people would be looking for. The outcome of this was that courses were arranged in Caring, Computing and Catering which we attended on Friday afternoons in our own time over a fifteen week period. The firm also offered a two day job search skills course and a communications skills course which were done in the firm's time. The courses were either held in the training room at the factory or at Accrington College. I attended the two day job search skills course and the computer course.

While many people took advantage of the courses others held the attitude that they were a waste of time or they lacked the confidence to try them. From the firm's point of view they had production figures to meet and orders to fill so they can't afford to have shop floor workers on courses indefinitely. At one time the Friday afternoon classes clashed with the overtime and it was difficult for people to choose between the two. But I'm quite prepared to give my own time up. It shows you're prepared to put something into it yourself.

The result of all this activity for me, is that I have gained confidence, learnt new skills, learnt to deal with new situations and now the future holds more promise than it did two years ago.

My priority had been looking after my family and for the first time in years I'm doing something for myself.

I think that on shop floors all over Britain there are workers who have talents that lie dormant because they are not given the opportunity to find out what their capabilities are.

**Jean Hewitt (in Frank, 1992)**

# Part Three:

# Employers

# Chapter Nine

## Introduction to the Survey

---

## Section 1: Background

To complement the Case Studies in the previous section, we felt it would be important to find out what attitudes existed among employers in the same geographical area who were not running such schemes, towards the kind of 'education at work' outlined in these case studies. At the time we began our research, there was very little information available in the UK about the extent of basic skills needs in the workplace.

Research in the U.S. had pointed to the importance of basic skills training. As far back as 1982, a widely quoted U.S. report based on interviews and observation of a cross section of workers found that blue collar workers spend 100 minutes on information processing tasks every day (Mikulecky, 1982).

A research study carried out in the US in 1989 by The Omega Group, Philadelphia (Omega Group, 1989) interviewed 28 'top executives' in a range of services and industries to ascertain how aware they were of the size of the 'problem' of lack of basic skills within their own organizations, and where they felt that the responsibility for dealing with it lay. There was a very mixed response, ranging from the attitude that rigorous screening criteria are necessary to 'keep the illiterate out', or that jobs need to be downgraded to make them simpler to perform:

> *"... if we can't get smarter people, we'll get smarter technology and we'll transfer the work to technology and, in effect, we can afford to hire less able, or to put it bluntly, stupider, people"*
> (ibid, p12)

to a feeling that the role of the organization is to *"develop skills, promote the worker, and enhance the quality of a person's life".*

> *".. when a company looks at its employees as more than cogs in a machine, they see whole human beings whose entire lives affect their work performance...".*
> (ibid, p13)

In the UK, a series of large-scale surveys on training within companies was commissioned by the government, carried out in 1986 and 1987, and published in 1989 (Training Agency, (b) 1989). It reported on, among other things, the extent of employers' training activities; the take-up of training among workers by social class; and the attitudes of employers towards training - the benefits they saw from training, and the reasons why they might choose not to train.

The main conclusions from this series of surveys, summarised in the Main Report (Training Agency (a) 1989) stressed that although a considerable amount of training is undertaken in

Britain, participation in this training varies considerably, with many unqualified and older people getting no training:

> *"the reported percentage of unskilled and semi-skilled workers over 35 years old having had any training in the past three years was 11% in 1987.*
> (ibid, our emphasis).

The report also concluded that

> *"whatever specific skills people eventually concentrate on, a period of initial broad based education and training is important. This allows them to respond more effectively to the increasingly rapid changes in technology and work."*
> (ibid, our emphasis).

Workbase Training, the consultancy which specialises in helping companies to set up that kind of 'initial broad based education and training', feels that the lack of such training contributes to the barriers that stop manual workers participating in training and in changes within their organization. (Stephanie Pordage, Workbase Training consultant, at a seminar held at Baxi Heating, November 1992).

An Institute of Manpower Studies report (Atkinson & Papworth, 1991) based on a postal survey of 1800 employers and follow-up interviews with 27 of them, looked at the literacy requirements of 'less skilled jobs'. Atkinson and Papworth found that although some employers were willing to recruit people with literacy difficulties, and that half their respondents had in fact done so, this readiness *"varied inversely with labour market slackness"* - i.e. the more unemployment there was, and the more applications there were for each job, the less employers would take on people with literacy difficulties.

They found that if employers felt literacy was unnecessary in a job, they were about twice as likely to have recruited someone with a reading or writing problem, than if they thought it was vital. They found that about two thirds of the employers who had employed people with literacy difficulties believed that those people had performed adequately in their job. They found very little evidence of any support for those people within the workplace, and what help was offered came mainly in the form of informal, on-the-job assistance, and mainly for those employed in larger companies.

They found that perceived literacy needs were rising in about half the sample, largely due to 'changing legislative/regulatory requirements'. Other reasons given for the perceived increases in literacy demands of jobs were technological change, changes in work organization, and the demands of BS5750 and other new quality standards.

So, we have a situation in the UK of an overall paucity of training for people with few or no qualifications, working in low-paid jobs, contrasted with a need identified by employers for broader-based education and training to cope with changes. The results of the US 'Omega' survey showed that the top executives questioned had no real ideas or coherent policy to tackle the issues of lack of basic skills at the workplace. We knew that there were, however, positive initiatives in workplace basic skills training world-wide and in the UK.

Given the situation outlined above, we were interested to find out how far employers in our project area, the North West of England, were aware of these trends, to find out what they knew about the concept of workplace basic skills training, whether any companies had heard of this kind of training going on elsewhere, or if indeed they were already carrying it out: and what need they felt there was for it in their organizations.

We decided to carry out a survey of local employers as part of the overall project, to ask these questions, and others, including a general overview of training offered within the company to semi-skilled and unskilled workers, and some questions about the benefits they felt would accrue to the company from workplace basic skills training, and what might block the company from running it. Our methodology and the results of this survey are set out below.

**Three Other Surveys**

After we had completed our survey, we received reports from two pieces of research commissioned by ALBSU, the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit, (IMS, 1992; IMS, 1993; and ALBSU, 1993), both working in this area, and we also made contact with the Leeds University Adult Education Department's research project 'Adult Learners At Work', which was looking at 'employee development', or general education, schemes.

*1. Basic Skills At Work*

As part of the 'Basic Skills at Work' programme, run by ALBSU and funded by the Departments of Employment and Education, mentioned in Chapter Two above, a series of surveys of employers was undertaken by the Institute of Manpower Studies (IMS) in 1991 and 1992 in 73 'TEC' (Training and Enterprise Council) areas in England and Wales. A total of 24000 employing establishments were included in the survey, which was carried out mainly by questionnaire, with a small sample of follow-up telephone interviews. 770 of these establishments were in the Lancashire area (jointly LAWTEC, Lancashire Area West TEC and ELTEC, East Lancashire TEC). A report on the findings for Lancashire was submitted to the two Lancashire TECs in 1992 (IMS, 1992) and a synthesis of the national results has been published in a concise report (IMS (a), 1993) and a supplementary volume (IMS (b), 1993).

Employers were asked to concentrate on the largest group of similar jobs below professional/ technical level, and were given a framework detailing four different levels within the core skills for reading, writing, numeracy and oral communications, on which to rate the requirement for the particular job or jobs they were considering. This framework had been adapted and simplified from the ALBSU/City & Guilds 'Wordpower' and 'Numberpower' competencies, and the two competencies for 'Writing Skills' are given below in Fig 9.1 as an example.

In addition, the employers were asked to gauge whether they felt there had been any changes in the importance of basic skills at work over the previous five years; and whether they were satisfied with the level of basic skills of their employees and of those of applicants for jobs.

The results for the national average did not differ significantly from the Lancashire Labour Market in any of these areas.

| Writing Skill 1 | Foundation Level | Level 1 | Level 2 | Level 3 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Write accurate letters, notes, reports or messages | Write short, simple notes or letters conveying up to two separate ideas | Write reports, letters or notes conveying up to four separate ideas | Write material in a specialised format (eg specifications, contracts, formal letters | Write material in a variety of appropriate styles and formats according to need |
| **Writing Skill 2** | **Foundation Level** | **Level 1** | **Level 2** | **Level 3** |
| Complete forms or other pre-formatted documents | Fill in a basic form (eg write an order form, booking slip, receipt) | Complete a simple form (eg application form, timesheet, claim form) | Complete an open-ended form (eg accident report form, telephone message form | Complete forms in a variety of appropriate styles and formats as required |

*Fig 9.1. Writing Skills: four levels of competence*
(Source: IMS 1992, p.13)

*Requirements of basic skills*

It was found that on average employers estimate that:

> *"the three communication skills (reading, writing and oral communication) are generally required to just below Level 1. Numeracy skills are required to just below Foundation level"* and *"oral communication skills are needed to a slightly higher level".*
>
> (IMS 1992, p.15)

Different occupations were seen to have their own pattern of basic skills needs. Secretarial/clerical jobs mostly require reading, writing, and oral communications: machine operaters and other manual jobs are more likely to require reading and oral communications than writing and numeracy. Skilled/craft jobs needed a higher level of calculation skills.

*Changes in the importance of basic skills*

Although around half of the employers felt that there had been no significant change in the amount that reading, writing and numeracy skills were needed at work, and a very few (from 0 to 4%) felt that their importance was declining, just under half felt that these had increased in importance. In the case of oral communications, over half the respondents felt that they had increased in importance - almost as much in the case of manual as in the case of non-manual jobs.

*Satisfaction with existing levels in workers and applicants*

The reports suggested that most employers were satisfied or fairly satisfied with their workers' basic skills levels. However, one in ten respondents felt that *"their basic skill supply is only just*

*adequate or worse"*, particularly among manual occupations (ibid p.48). When looking at the wider labour market, about one in four respondents felt that the basic skills demonstrated by applicants were *"only just adequate"* or less. Production sector respondents were less satisfied with their workers and applicants than the service sector, and similarly the private sector were less satisfied than the public sector. As could be expected, satisfaction is lowest among establishments who have found difficulties in recruiting workers in the local labour market.

The national report concludes:

> *"The increasing importance placed on basic skills by half our respondents, the accelerating effects of information technology on skill requirements, the rising incidence of quality assurance initiatives, and the growth of multi-skilled jobs through the reorganisation of work, all point in one direction: that an initiative to provide systematic remedial training for people without satisfactory basic skills would be in employers' long term interests."*
>
> (IMS, 1993, p55).

2. *'The Cost To Industry'*

The second survey report, "The Cost To Industry: Basic Skills and the UK Workforce" (ALBSU, 1993) is in two parts. The second part makes an attempt to put a figure on the amount which poor basic skills costs UK industry each year. This figure was arrived at by asking a total of 400 employers what effect basic skills difficulties had on their organisations, and then grossing these figures up to generalise across the whole of UK industry. Effects included, for example, the cost of cancelled orders due to errors; the cost of future orders lost due to poor communications; the cost of staff to check others' work, who could be dispensed with if the basic skills levels were higher: and the cost of recruiting staff externally because their internal workforce did not have adequate basic skills to be promoted.

This survey arrived at a final figure of £4,828 million: seen by ALBSU as an *underestimate*, as it does not include companies of under 50 employees, nor *"the cost of lost future business"*.

This kind of analysis can cause problems. Instead of achieving its desired aim, of persuading industry to work towards improving the basic skills of the workforce, there is a risk that this kind of study can have the opposite effect: of making industry see 'the worker with basic skills difficulties' as being the cause of all its ills. Commenting on a similar exercise carried out in Canada, Susan Hoddinott says:

> *"The unfortunate tendency of many literacy lobbyists to count the costs of illiteracy in terms of lost hours of work, accidents at work, industrial waste, etc., - a position embraced by business and industry and sometimes even echoed by Labour - is almost certain to provide the 'evidence' which will persuade employers that they cannot afford to have illiterate workers on staff. It would be naive to assume that industry would look at education for those workers at company expense as a solution, given the vast numbers of better educated unemployed they have to choose from."*
>
> (Hoddinott, 1988)

Apart from attempting to 'count the cost', the first part of this ALBSU survey asked some more general questions to gauge the levels of basic skills difficulties among the workforce as perceived by employers; to state whether they felt that problems with basic skills affected how well the employees undertook the duties expected of them; to say what importance they placed on good basic skills; if they felt their company would benefit from improving the basic skills of the workforce and how; how they felt individuals were affected by having poor basic skills; if they were doing any training in the area of basic skills; and how they assessed the basic skills levels of new staff.

In the survey, employers reported 1 in 7 manual workers having problems with reading, 1 in 6 with problems with verbal communication, 1 in 5 with problems with numeracy, and 1 in 4 with poor writing skills. About a quarter of respondents said that poor basic skills affected the work of manual workers: and that even at managerial level this figure was 1 in 7 (14%).

About half the respondents said that they placed a great deal of importance on each basic skill, particularly good communications skills. The survey found that four out of five companies recognise that they would benefit from improving the basic skills of the workforce. Ways in which they felt they would benefit included: improved efficiency; fewer errors; better understanding; reduced need for supervision; better work; better customer relations; improved product quality; better understanding of the job; improved productivity; and more profit/reduced costs.

Over half of the respondents felt that lack of basic skills led to lack of confidence.

27% of respondents had a formal policy addressing the issue of basic skills among employees. 71% had no specific policy. 39% said they offered training in basic skills, particularly communications skills. Both in-house and college courses were mentioned. The survey found 59% of respondents offering no basic skills training.

Blocks to putting on basic skills training mentioned by respondents included: a belief that staff had adequate skills; management's not having considered the issue - and some respondents who answered in this way realised that they might be unaware of problems existing in their own workforce; other forms of training taking priority (53%); and no budget to invest in this kind of training (30%).

We have reported the findings of these projects in some detail in this section, as they are very relevant to our work and our ideas. It would, of course, have been very useful to have had access to these reports when designing our own survey. As it is, although our survey focuses on one region of the UK rather than the whole country, we were able to discuss some of the issues in greater depth with our respondents because of the less structured interview schedule which we were using. We think that our findings complement and extend those of the other two surveys reported on here.

*3. The Leeds Adult Learners at Work Large Employers Survey*

A third report which reached us after we had completed our survey was that carried out by the Leeds Adult Learners at Work project, based at the University of Leeds Department of Adult Continuing Education. This project is a UFC funded project looking throughout the UK at employee development programmes: i.e. programmes where employers were sponsoring workers to undertake training, often in work time, and not necessarily work-related. The Project's Large Employer Survey report (Payne et al, 1992) looked at the responses to a detailed questionnaire returned by 31 large firms known to be either running 'Employee Development' schemes, or 'regarded as leaders in the field of training'.

Only one company in this survey mentioned basic skills as a training priority, and the report suggested that these 'employee development' schemes were not addressing the issues of those who traditionally did not take up education opportunities, such as shift workers, unskilled workers, and people with literacy difficulties:

> *"When asked about priorities, these were in fact biased towards groups who have traditionally done well out of training. Comments such as 'no priorities' and 'courses are open to the whole workforce' deny the reality that it is precisely those adults who have benefited least from the education system who benefit least from company training".*
>
> (ibid)

We included a section in our own interview schedule on the extent to which employers would respond positively to requests from workers for non-work related training, or non-compulsory training, and the Leeds survey is of interest in dealing specifically with this area of education at work. The project's final report, to be published in July 1993, is to include case studies of this kind of scheme, and an analysis of the perceptions of those involved (*"the shop-floor, the office, the trade union representatives, the production manager"*), seeing how far they agree with the opinions of the personnel and training managers who completed the questionnaires.

This last point involving comparison of different perspectives on the issue of learning at work is an important one. Most of the survey research on the need for basic skills training is based on information and opinions from employers and managers. Research which solicits information directly from employees, or observation of actual practices in the workplace is much rarer (see eg Gowan, 1990). But it is arguably an essential part of developing full understanding of the real basic skills needs and requirements in the workplace.

## Section 2: The Survey Methodology

This section deals with the sampling methods and the interviewing procedure we used in our own employer survey. The results of the survey are contained in the next chapter.

**Sampling**

We decided to conduct the main body of the survey by telephone interview, as it was felt that the more usual methodology for a survey of this type - postal questionnaire followed by follow-up telephone call with those respondents expressing willingness to talk further on the subject - might well mean that those companies which did not feel that workplace basic skills training was relevant for them would exclude themselves from the survey, and we particularly wanted to hear the opinions of these companies. The telephone contact also enabled us to explain the idea of 'basic skills' to many respondents who were not familiar with it and who might therefore have mis-interpreted questions on a questionnaire.

We planned to use a semi-structured interview format, dealing with the same main themes with each respondent, but leaving scope for interviewees to bring up related issues of interest or relevance to their own particular situation. The interview schedule used is enclosed as Annex 4.

A final total of 100 telephone interviews was aimed for, so, assuming a refusal rate of 50%, a sample of 200 companies was taken.

The directory used to compile the sample was the 'Kompass Regional Sales Guide, No. 2 for N.W. England and Northern Ireland', initially for 1989/90, then 1990/91 and 1991/92. This directory is set out under counties - Lancashire, Cheshire, Merseyside, Greater Manchester, and Northern Ireland - and within each county companies are listed alphabetically under postal town. Company details include name, address, business activity (under general headings), number of employees, turnover, and names of contacts within departments. Kompass's National Directory aims to be a complete directory of commencial and industrial activity in the UK.

It was decided to restrict the survey to Lancashire, Cheshire and Merseyside since the three case studies the project originally aimed to cover were based in these areas. It was felt important to have a good sample across different sizes of companies, and to include a range of employers from urban centres (like Warrington and Liverpool) with high clusters of companies, from medium sized towns (like Burnley, Macclesfield) and from smaller, more residential towns (like Morecambe, Nantwich) where fewer companies were established.

The sample of 200 companies was to be divided across six different size groups to give a sample evenly balanced by size of company:

Size A: over 500 employees
Size B: 250-499 employees
Size C: 100-249 employees
Size D: 50-99 employees
Size E: 20-49 employees
Size F: under 20 employees

To divide the sample across towns and cities with large, medium and small clusters of companies, the number of companies (or columns of companies) listed under each postal town was counted, to give a rough idea of how the companies were spread throughout the region. There were 58 towns listed over the three counties (20 in Cheshire, 25 in Lancashire and 13 in Merseyside).

These towns were divided into five 'ranges', from Range 1 (towns/villages with little industrial activity) to Range 5 (town/city with a lot of industrial activity). The seven towns or villages with less than five companies listed were ignored.

It was decided to take a sample of 40 companies, divided approximately equally among the six company sizes A-F, from each group of towns in the same size range.

In Range 1, therefore, 2 companies were chosen from each of 20 towns, and so on as listed in Figure 9.2.

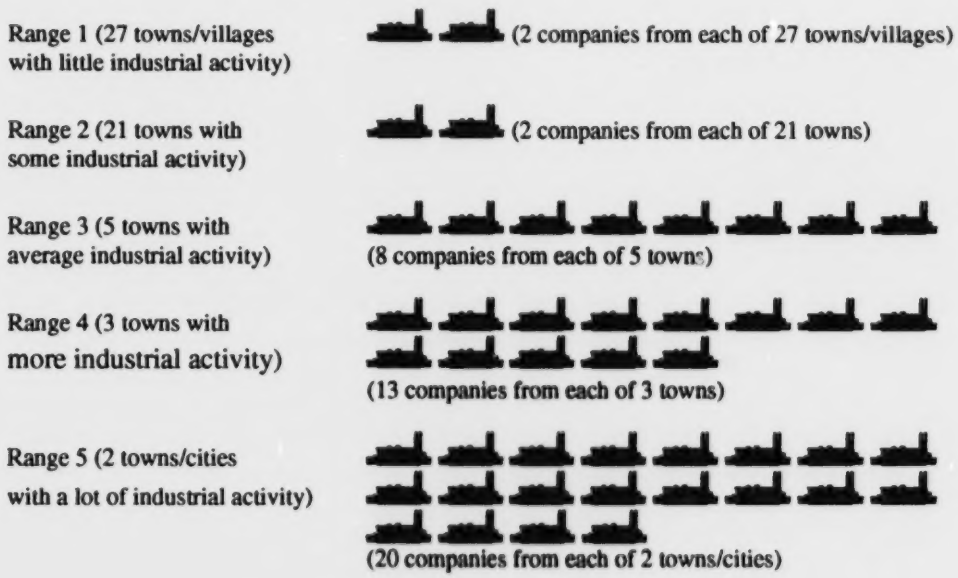

Range 1 (27 towns/villages with little industrial activity)
(2 companies from each of 27 towns/villages)
Range 2 (21 towns with some industrial activity)
(2 companies from each of 21 towns)
Range 3 (5 towns with average industrial activity)
(8 companies from each of 5 towns)
Range 4 (3 towns with more industrial activity)
(13 companies from each of 3 towns)
Range 5 (2 towns/cities with a lot of industrial activity)
(20 companies from each of 2 towns/cities)

*Figure 9.2: Number of companies sampled in each range*

This resulted in 62 companies being sampled from Cheshire, 99 companies being sampled from Lancashire (with the largest number of postal towns listed), and 42 companies from Merseyside (with the fewest number of postal towns).

As far as possible, companies were selected randomly throughout the alphabetical list under each town, starting anywhere from the first to the tenth company listed, but this had to be varied to get an approximately equal number of companies from the six sizes A-F within each town size range.

It was originally planned to include a separate, smaller sample of public sector organizations, but this was not included in the current survey due to time considerations.

**Procedure**

The survey started with a pilot group of 5 companies in Yorkshire, and progressed to Cheshire, and then Lancashire, in clusters of about 20 companies at a time.

An initial telephone call was made to establish who in the company was responsible for training of non-managerial staff. Then an introductory letter (see Annex 5) was sent out to that named person, giving brief details of the survey and asking that person to expect a telephone call from the researcher shortly.

Within two weeks of sending the letter in most cases, the first telephone contact was made with the company, and an arrangement was made for a time in which to conduct the telephone interview.

The interval between the first telephone contact and the final interview was anything between minimal (i.e. the respondent agreed to be interviewed straight away) and four months; for various reasons. Variations in the length of time it took between the initial telephone call included (on the part of respondents) holidays, work commitments, difficulty in contacting the original 'named person', pre-arranged interview times being cancelled by the respondent due to pressure of work, other appointments, etc; the 'named person' having left and having been replaced with another person, or not replaced at all; the person originally named saying that they were not in fact responsible for training, etc: and (on the part of the research associate) the five months maternity leave she took in the second half of 1991, and pressures from other sections of the research.

Permission was asked of the respondents to tape record the interviews: a very small number refused permission, and handwritten notes were kept of those interviews. Verbatim transcripts were made of the rest.

5 companies in the initial sample were not contacted, either because the listed telephone number was giving 'number unobtainable', or because they did not answer the initial telephone calls on more than four occasions.

3 companies were contacted, but were not sent letters, because their training was coordinated from a Head Office outside the geographical area of the survey.

3 companies were sent letters which were returned 'gone away'. This is a significant statistic in the economic climate prevalent during the time the survey was carried out: there was a recession which was widely expected to end at the end of 1991, but which showed no sign of lifting during 1992. One faxed message returned our letter with a poignant handwritten comment *"Sorry - too late! T. H...., former Purchasing Manager, sole remaining employee - and counting!"*.

23 companies had refused to be interviewed, at the first telephone contact stage (19% refusal rate). Reasons given for refusal included "too busy" (7 companies), "not relevant to them" - either because they did not do any training, or had no non-managerial staff (9 companies) and, again, "closing down" or "in receivership" (3 companies).

At the end of our data collection period, early September 1992, 57 telephone interviews had been carried out, of which 4 were pilots. Of those four, the records of one, which had not been tape recorded, had been accidentally erased from the computer, leaving 56 usable interviews. 38 companies were still at the 'pending' stage, i.e. they had been sent a letter and/or had had an initial telephone call, but in the case of the companies which had received a letter it had not been possible to conduct the interview by the date mentioned in the letter, and in the case of those companies which had had the initial telephone call, it had not been possible to make a mutually convenient time to conduct the interview within the time available.

This left 74 companies, in Lancashire and Merseyside, which had not been contacted at all. It was decided to send them a questionnaire at this late stage, to enlarge on the responses given in the telephone survey. The questionnaire used is attached to this report as Annex 6.

After a reminder was sent out, a total of 19 questionnaires were returned, of which all but 2 were completed, (a 23% response rate for the questionnaires) giving a final overall response rate of 36% (see fig 9.3 overleaf).

| | |
|---|---|
| Companies originally contacted:<br>extra companies added during sampling | 200<br>3 |
| Did not answer first calls: | 5 |
| Referred to Head Office out of area: | 3 |
| Letters returned marked 'Gone Away': | 3 |
| Refusals on first or subsequent telephone calls | 23 |
| Contacted but not interviewed: | 38 |
| Successfully interviewed: | 57 |
| Usable interviews:<br>(62% of companies approached) | **56** |
| Contacted with questionnaire: | 74 |
| Did not return questionnaire: | 55 |
| Returned questionnaire:<br>Of these, completed questionnaire<br>(23% of companies approached) | 19<br>**17** |
| TOTAL: | 203 |
| TOTAL OF USABLE RESPONSES: (56+17) =<br>(36% of total sample) | 73 |

*Fig 9.3. Employer Survey: The Sample*

# Chapter Ten

## Employers' Awareness of and Attitudes to Workplace Skills Training: The Survey Results

---

## Section One: Characteristics of Companies Included in the Final Sample (n=73)

### 1. Number of employees

Given the attempts above to produce a sample which was evenly balanced for size, the eventual sample, as shown in the table below (Fig 10.1) was reasonably well mixed, with 40 companies employing under 100 people and 33 employing over 100.

| | | Number of companies |
|---|---|---|
| Size A: | over 500 employees | 10 |
| Size B: | 250-499 employees | 11 |
| Size C: | 100-249 employees | 12 |
| Size D: | 50-99 employees | 17 |
| Size E: | 20-49 employees | 11 |
| Size F: | under 20 employees | 12 |
| | TOTAL | 73 |

*Table 10.1. Companies in final sample by number of employees*

### 2. Size of locations of companies

Within the five 'ranges' of towns varying from a little to a lot of industrial activity, the companies were ranged as shown in Table 10.2.

| size: | A | B | C | D | E | F | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Range 1 (in a town with little business activity) | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 10 |
| Range 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 6 | 1 | 3 | 16 |
| Range 3 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 5 | 6 | 2 | 21 |
| Range 4 | - | 2 | 6 | 2 | 1 | - | 11 |
| Range 5 (in a town with a lot of business activity | 3 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 4 | 15 |
| TOTALS | 10 | 11 | 12 | 17 | 11 | 12 | 73 |

*Table 10.2. Companies in final sample by location and number of employees*

### 3. Business Activities

The main business activities of most (51) of the companies was manufacturing, ranging from hydraulic valves to dishcloths, from pharmaceuticals to schoolwear. Included in this were 28 companies involved in engineering/steel work: 3 in the food trade: 5 in textiles and footwear. The non-manufacturing companies included packing and distribution companies (7), transport companies, a Hotels group and a contract cleaning company.

This is not wholly representative of the North West, where there is now as much service industry as manufacturing in most areas: but we felt that it would be mainly within manufacturing where we would find the most opportunity to discuss the basic skills needs of manual workers. In the ALBSU report on the Lancashire Labour Market (IMS 1992) it was noted that *"production sector industries tend to be less satisfied with applicants' basic skills than is the case in the service sector"* - where presumably basic skills have been a part of the job for longer, and where people are more likely to be 'vetted' at interview for their basic skills ability.

### *4. Respondents*

The respondent differed across the companies surveyed. Usually the respondent was the person responsible for training for non-managerial staff (or who would have been responsible had such training existed). Occasionally (four times) the interviewer was passed on to a secretary or assistant in the department, who sometimes referred back to the original 'named person' when there was a query. Table 10.3 gives details of respondents.

In the smaller companies, we spoke to the Managing Director (17 respondents, all but one in companies with under 100 employees). 19 respondents were managers with various functions such as Production Manager, Mill Manager, Service Manager, Works Manager, Commercial Manager. We spoke to two Financial Controllers, 1 Work Study Officer, and 3 Company Secretaries.

The larger companies tended to have a specific Training function: all but one of the 11 Training or Education Managers who responded were based in companies with over 250 employees. In addition, 14 Personnel or Personnel and Training Managers took part in the survey.

In the case of the Managing Directors, it can be assumed that theirs would be 'the firm's view': in some of the other cases, it was overtly stated that the opinion being expressed was that of the respondent only, rather than the company. Occasionally there was evidence of some conflict: for example the manager in the medium sized Lancashire manufacturers who felt that he himself would encourage workers to take up evening classes by helping them with fees, but did not feel that there would be support for this view from his superiors; as they were the budget holders, that would be where the decisions would be made.

| | |
|---|---|
| Managing Director | 15 |
| Training Officer/education liaison officer | 10 |
| Personnel/personnel and training manager | 15 |
| Other manager | 25 |
| Other (secretary, personal asst. etc) | 8 |
| Total | 73 |

*Table 10.3. Job title of respondents*

**5. Occupational focus**

Within each company, one section of the interview/ questionnaire dealt with the reading, writing and maths tasks involved in one or two non-supervisory jobs within the company. There was a wide range of jobs featuring in the survey, which we have listed in Table 10.4.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| accounts clerks | housekeepers | repair staff |
| assembly workers | injection moulding operators | room maids |
| boiler-makers | loom overlockers | sales staff |
| brewery process workers | maintenance workers | security officers |
| bricklayers | machine operators/minders | semi-skilled workers |
| caretakers | mechanical fitters | service engineers |
| chargehands | metal workers | sewing machinists |
| chefs | millers | shop floor workers |
| cleaners | mixing room workers | skilled moulders |
| clerical staff | motor strippers | solderers |
| crane drivers | needle fillers | store workers |
| cutters | net fixers | turners |
| draymen | office workers | vehicle builders |
| drivers | order pickers | wardens |
| dyehouse operators | packers | warehouse staff |
| electricians | paint sprayers | weavers |
| fabricators | panel beaters | welders |
| fitters | pipe fitters | window installers |
| forklift truck drivers | press setters | wire workers/wire benders |
| furnace men | process staff | workshop technicians |
| general labourers | production workers | |

*Table 10.4. Occupations discussed in the survey*

## 6. Selected profiles of companies

In order to give an idea of the range of opinions we were coming across, and also to give some of the fuller picture which lies behind the results which follow, we give below pen-pictures of five of the companies in our survey.

*Interview 7.*

A hydraulic valve manufacturing company employing between 50 and 99 people (size D), in a small town in Cheshire. The respondent was the Financial Controller. Since the company had gone for BS5750, things needed to be documented more fully. Writing tasks of 'process people' and machine operators included filling in set job sheets, which would include information on the set of specifications met by a piece of equipment. Maths tasks would include some statistical calculations, and being able to understand what a meter was telling you. Written tests were carried out at interview.

Training for non-supervisory staff included 'job inter-changeability', and the company had sponsored both managerial and non-managerial workers in off-the-job training, including paying for OU and language courses: a German class was currently being run in-house. Criteria used for sponsoring workers on training was *"if we can see some benefits for the company - if we can see that what they do is going to make them a better employee and have a bit more input into the company - depending on what they do, we can't always spare people, but if we can see the benefit we'd pay".*

Basic skills: the respondent felt that the general standard of presentation of job application forms was poor, but did not see a need currently for basic skills training in the company, as *"with the current unemployment situation* [they] *could afford to be choosy".* The respondent did not feel that the company should have to run basic skills training at work, and felt it was up to the Government to pay. For this small company blocks to putting on this training would include finding the time, and paying for it - they preferred to concentrate on job-related training; also they had no experience in running basic skills training and wouldn't know how to go about it.

Benefits of basic skills training would include workers needing less supervision, and *"if we give them something which would help them in their lives, they'd be inclined to put a bit more into what they were doing".*

*Interview 13*

With the personnel and training manager of a large national hotel chain employing 3000 employees all over the country and based in a large industrial centre in Cheshire. Non-managerial jobs cover a wide range of workers, from chef, housekeeper, room maid, from unskilled to highly skilled, and include many workers who speak languages other than English.

Basic skills used on the job include simple calculations, counting, reading instructions and safety notices. These have not changed much except there is now a greater emphasis on better communication skills and safety information. There is no formal entry test, but the company establishes at interview that applicants are literate and numerate through questioning them and getting people to fill in application forms themselves.

The company has recently won a national training award and offers an extensive training programme for employees 'across the board' - everything from social skills, health and safety, on-the-job training, to skills for trainers and English for speakers of other languages. Literacy and numeracy training is available, to school leavers only, through specific modules built into their technical 'Caterbase' training. These teach the specific literacy and numeracy needed on the job by linking written assignments with placements in different departments. Assignments are returned to F.E. college-based tutors co-ordinating the training programme.

Older employees wanting help with basic skills would need to approach personnel, or sometimes a supervisor will identify a need. The policy is to find an appropriate remedial course. This policy applies to anyone in the company. A major benefit of such training is to identify and prepare potential supervisors. This training manager felt that sometimes people are not open about difficulties, but pointed out that the structure of hotel work is close so you can't hide your difficulties easily as you might in a factory. There is always a supervisor on hand and they get to know people well within weeks.

The company bears the cost of basic skills training using local FE Colleges. Though satisfied with basic skills provision in the locality, the training manager is aware that the quality of provision does vary across the country, and from college to college.

*Interview 25*

With the personnel officer of a food packaging company in a medium-sized Lancashire town. The company employs 115 people of whom 70 are non-supervisory staff (Size C). These include unskilled process workers and packers and skilled engineers. Packers need to read labels, follow recipes and put them together. For this they need basic reading and writing and 'secondary school level' maths. The basic skills demands of these jobs have not changed over the last 5 years, but now with TQM and BS5750 coming up *"you need a better class of employee"* so there is a need for training. The company does not use entry tests, but the application form, completed on site, is used to identify any problems with reading and writing.

In the past, the company did not invest much in training, but the recent appointment of a personnel officer signals a change of management thinking on this. Currently, the company runs managerial courses, hygiene courses for process workers and training for team leaders on the shop floor. The idea has been to concentrate on improving management skills first with a plan to move on to shop floor training. Up to now there have been no requests for other training from the shop floor workers, but the company would be very supportive to this kind of request, as its philosophy is to support the development of basic communication skills, especially among younger workers.

The personnel officer felt that the benefits of basic skills training would be better relationships, improved motivation and a better class of employee, but thought it might be difficult to convince people to start on such courses. This respondent feels the company should pay for them, but wasn't sure how (*"any outside help would be welcome!"*). Our respondent was not aware of what other companies were doing in this area, but knew that local colleges and the TEC provided help with basic skills training: and thought that if the company did consider running basic skills courses, outside trainers would be used to run courses on site.

*Interview 28.*

A textile manufacturer based in a medium sized Lancashire town, employing just over 500 people (Size A). Non-supervisory staff included warehousemen, loom overlookers, machinists, weavers and hemmers. The respondent was the Training and Personnel Manager. Over the past few years there had been more emphasis on quality instructions, which had to be read, so there was more need currently to be able to understand the written word. In addition, the particular quality of cloth had to be identified. Writing would only be a matter of ticking or signing worksheets.

There was no written test at interview, and very little training on-the-job for non-managerial staff: normally only qualified or experienced staff were taken on in those areas.

Basic Skills: our respondent did not feel that basic skills training was needed in the company. However, for the past six months the company had been paying for one worker to attend basic skills training put on by an outside training provider in the area: this worker's basic skills needs had been pointed out by the training provider during a short warehousing course which they had run for the company, and although this individual did not need to use basic skills in his current job, it would possibly have become a problem in the future:

*"We haven't noticed any improvement, because it wasn't apparent to us before ... he's in an area, the warehouse, that is developing, and a problem would occur sooner or later, had the training provider not identified this problem."*

Our respondent said it was possible that individual managers had provided informal on-the-job basic skills training with other staff in the past, in order to equip them to do their job.

This respondent felt that basic skills training would provide increased confidence ("*ultimately, the man in question is bound to be more confident ...*"), that it would be up to the company to pay for basic skills training if it was needed, but that time off during the day would be a problem for any great numbers.

*Interview 52*

With the works manager of a small engineering business, based in a small Lancashire town. The company is part of a large group, but is run as a separate company with control over its own budgets. The company employs 19 people, 15 of them in non-managerial positions, (size F) working as assemblers, unskilled and semi-skilled labourers, forklift drivers, skilled fitters and turners.

Not much writing is used in these jobs but people need to read information from worksheets, for manufacturing instructions and to do simple divisions, multiplications and additions. They need to be able to *"split products into so many units of equal quantity"*. Paperwork requirements of jobs have *"tripled"* over recent years, mainly due to BS5750 and COSSH regulations, but the works manager felt that this hadn't really affected the semi-skilled workers much.

There is no entry test for literacy or numeracy. Applicants fill in a form, but *"we wouldn't exclude assemblers for spelling!"* All of those who deal with paperwork are literate. No one would be sacked for having literacy or numeracy problems, but employees have got to be able to read so they would probably *"move on"* if they couldn't cope.

Employees are sent off site to courses for forklift training and for safety regulations, otherwise people are inducted to new jobs and tasks informally on the job: "*people are looked after by more skilled workers, the foreman keeps an eye out that someone is competent to move on to a new machine*".

This respondent was not aware of NVQs or of other companies' providing basic skills training, and said there are no requests from employees for such training and felt it was very unlikely they could be financed if there were any such requests. *"We are weathering the recession but couldn't afford anything on training at the moment....we are frightened to death about the future"*.

Our respondent feels that school should deal with the basics; "*we pay our taxes for that*". In addition, this respondent feels that if new regulations increase literacy demands, then whoever writes those regulations should pay to get people trained so they can carry them out.

# Section Two: Breakdown of Responses to the Survey

### 1. General Training Practices

Respondents were asked to talk about their company's general training practices, to give a feel to the interview about the general training 'ethos' of the organization. It was quite likely that if the company offered no training whatever to its non-supervisory staff, it was unlikely to be interested in developing the basic skills of its workers.

The training offered within the sample ranged from 'none' (6 companies) through a minimal 'Health and Safety' and 'Fork Lift Truck driving' or 'basic on the job training' (9 companies) to companies with more structured training programmes including day release. Six companies mentioned an apprenticeship scheme, and the chain of hotels which had won a National Training Award for its across-the-board training for school-leavers, ran 'Caterbase' which included Literacy and Numeracy modules. The responses have been divided into 'no training', 'a little training' and 'a lot of training' on the lines outlined here: this is quite an arbitrary choice, and 'a lot of training' includes anything from a complete, certificated, integrated training course to 'one engineering apprentice'.

Four of the six companies which said they offered 'no training' to non-supervisory staff employed less than 100 people, and none of them employed more than 250 people. But 11 of those 23 companies which offered 'a lot of training' (48%) were also in size bands D, E and F (employing less than 100 people). So we did not find that smaller firms were offering significantly less training than larger firms, despite their being less likely to have a specific 'training function' within the organization.

| | Sizes A-C over 100 employees | Sizes D-F under 100 employees | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| Companies offering a lot of training | 12 | 11 | 23 |
| Companies offering a little training | 18 | 24 | 42 |
| Companies offering no training | 2 | 4 | 6 |
| Non-respondents | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| TOTAL | | | 73 |

*Table 10.5. Companies' training practices, by size*

**2. Responses to requests for sponsorship for individual training**

We asked employers whether they ever received requests from within the company (among all staff, including managerial staff) for sponsorship for additional training - for example evening classes, which could be in any subject from completely non-work related training, to directly work-related professional or vocational qualifications. We were surprised by the level of positive response to this question. The criteria for agreeing to pay for these classes seemed in general to be 'if it was relevant in some way to the employee's work'. Although more supervisory and management level employees took up these opportunities, and two respondents said that it would surprise them greatly if they were approached by manual staff to pay for extra training, this was not exclusively so.

One company said their policy was to refund the cost of courses retrospectively, if the employee passed the exam at the end. Several companies sponsored employees on foreign language training. Some companies publicised the policy (one company put a notice on the boards at the beginning of each term); others would just wait to be asked. One company which did not sponsor workers on evening classes did allow workers time off (unpaid) during the day for exams.

| COMPANIES WHICH HAD RECEIVED REQUESTS FOR SPONSORSHIP | | | COMPANIES WHICH HAD NOT RECEIVED REQUESTS | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Probable Response | | | Probable Response | | | |
| Yes | Perhaps | No | Yes | Perhaps | No | Don't Know |
| 31 | 9 | - | 8 | 2 | 4 | 12 |

TOTAL RESPONSES: 66 NOT ANSWERED: 7 TOTAL 73

*Table 10.6. Companies' responses to actual or potential requests for education sponsorship*

So out of 66 companies which answered this question, 50 of them, or 76%, would consider a favourable response to a request for sponsorship from an employee for a further education course.

This is not the same kind of arrangement as the well-documented Ford 'EDAP' - Employee Development and Assistance Programme - (see, for example, Payne et al forthcoming; Metcalf, 1992) where workers can apply for funds to take courses which are definitely not work-related. However the responses in this section indicated some kind of flexibility within the training budgets, where these existed, for individuals with the inclination and the confidence to do so, to ask for and to get extra training in their own time.

### 3. Use of reading, writing, Maths in manual jobs

The next set of questions focused more specifically on basic skills needs within the non-supervisory workforce. Respondents were asked to list the reading, writing and Maths tasks involved in one or two of the largest groups of manual jobs within their organization. Understandably, considering the wide range of procedures and jobs being considered, there was a wide range of responses to this section of the survey, and it can be seen, particularly looking also at the responses to the next section 'recent or predicted changes in these tasks', that manual work can no longer be defined as simply 'work with the hands'. It is this section which illustrates the importance of manual staff's having good core communication skills.

#### a) Reading tasks

Four companies (5%) said there was very little or no reading involved. The tasks mentioned by other respondents seemed to divide into three main categories: tasks related to the job itself, to documentary procedures relating to the job, and to the communications tasks involved when workers interact with their employers, other departments within the organization, and other organizations.

So, for example, reading tasks *related to the jobs themselves* included:

- reading drawings
- reading plans
- reading recipes
- identifying quality of cloth
- reading computer printouts
- reading 'batch formulation'
- reading running conditions from a machine

Reading tasks mentioned by employers which were more *related to procedure around the job* included:

- interpreting job specifications, job sheets,
- reading BS5750 procedures
- reading delivery notes, advice notes, loading sheets, picking lists, invoices, memos
- reading orders
- reading 'instructions', 'information', manufacturing manuals.

Reading tasks *relating to internal and external communications* included:

reading and understanding the contract of employment
reading health and safety notices
reading the monthly newsletter

**b) Writing Tasks**

Five respondents (7%) felt that there was no writing at all involved in the jobs they were discussing.

Writing tasks *related to the jobs themselves* included:

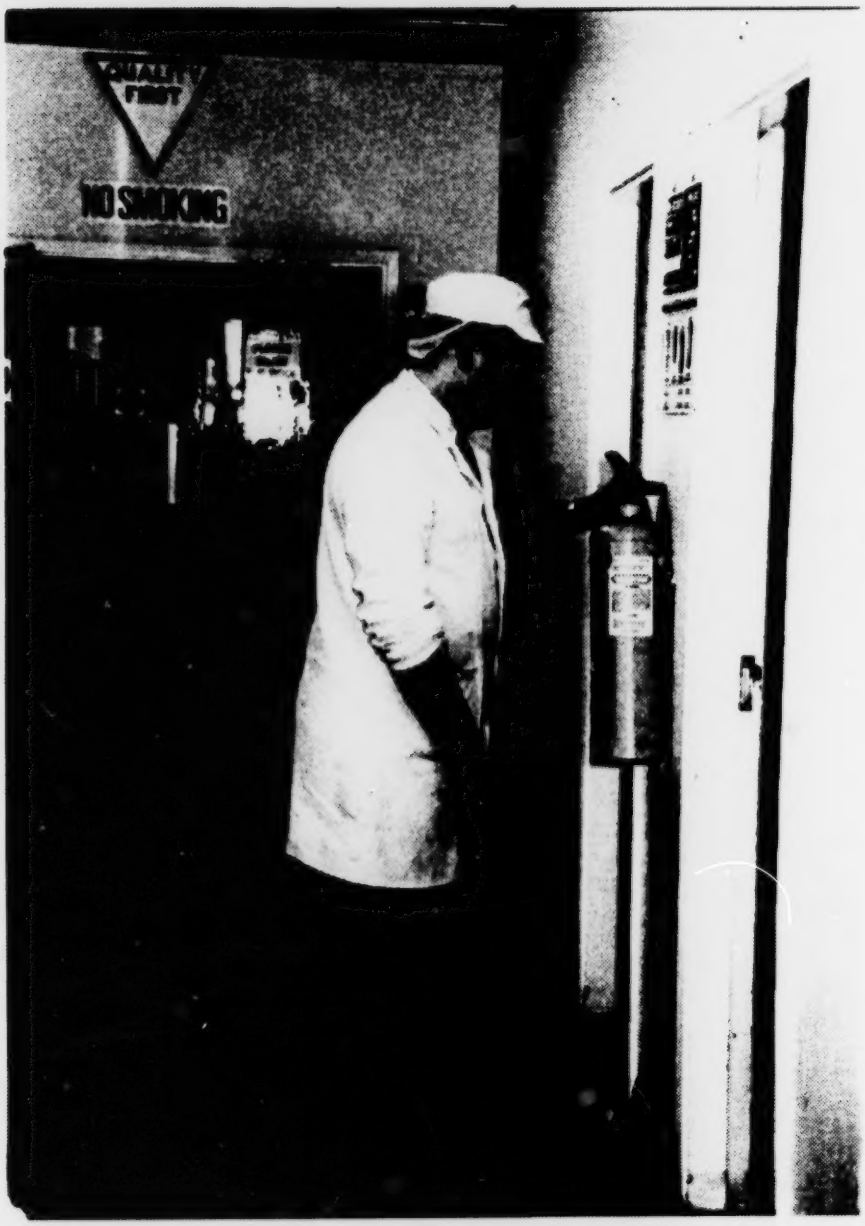
Recording colour inscription
Writing menus

Writing tasks which were more *related to procedure around the job* included:

filling in log sheet
writing labels
filling in, signing or ticking a job sheet
writing short reports
writing out orders, delivery notes, sales documents, record cards
booking out deliveries, booking in arrivals
writing out repair forms
recording quantities produced on production sheets
completing documentation relating to output quality
completing telephone orders and enquiries
writing procedure for manufacture

Writing tasks to do with *internal or external communications* included:

filling in accident forms
writing suggestions for company suggestions scheme
writing safety audit reports
communicating within departments
writing minutes of team briefings
writing invoices
writing phone messages
writing tickets when product transferred between departments
sending telexes




*Health and Safety Inspection*

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

**c) Maths tasks**

Four companies, again, (5%) felt there were no maths tasks needed by the workers in the jobs under discussion.

Maths tasks *related to the jobs themselves* included:

- picking so many of steel beams
- cutting up steel to a certain length
- counting containers
- setting microprocessor for weighing
- working out percentages for reprocess materials, ratios
- calculating tinting additions

Maths tasks relating to *internal and external communications* included:

- calculating own performance
- calculating bonus sheets
- filling in timesheets and logbooks

Other tasks mentioned (those followed by an asterisk refer to the use of equipment or machinery) included:

- simple calculations
- counting
- measuring
- coping with metrication
- performing statistical calculations
- setting machines*
- weighing products, checking dimensions
- calculating costings and raising invoices, credit notes
- checking deliveries
- calculating lengths, weights and kgs/hour
- converting dimensions
- calculating sizes
- doing stock checks
- reading numerical quantity/dimensions
- identifying goods
- using measuring tape*
- adding numbers together
- adding up invoices
- measuring on machines*
- working out mileage
- reading micrometers*
- splitting the product into so many units of quantity
- inputting digital instructions onto machine*

**4. Changes in Basic Skills Requirements in Manual Jobs**

To get an idea of the effect of new technology, quality standards requirements, etc, respondents were asked if they felt that the basic skills requirements (i.e. the tasks listed above) of the jobs under consideration had changed over the past five years, and in what way. They were not given any prompts for the way in which jobs may have changed. They were also asked if they envisaged any changes, or any further changes, over the next five years, and these answers have been merged in the tables below. 50 respondents (75% of those answering the question) mentioned increases in the need for basic skills in manual jobs: as opposed to 17 (25% of those answering) who said that there had been no changes. (6 companies did not respond to this question).

Factors mentioned included:

new technology, mainly with reference to computerisation;
raised customer expectations;
quality standards, variously mentioned as BS5750, quality management, and a higher quality product;
new equipment;
new procedures such as team working, multi-skilling, flexibility;
more and fuller documentation;
metrication;
Health and Safety At Work (HASAW) legislation including Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) regulations; and
increased volume of work.

One company reported that the amount of paperwork had doubled over the preceding five years. Only one company said that new technology (automated tills) had *decreased* the amount of inputting required by staff. Two companies - a small electric motor rewinding company, and a medium sized dyers - said that apart from new Health and Safety legislation, there had been no changes in their work over fifty years in the first case, and twenty years in the second.

At least three companies reported that much more writing was needed at shop-floor level:

> *"the work was checked by the foreman - now individuals do their own checking: we expect them to be intelligent enough to do what we want first time"*
>
> (Commercial manager at a small West Lancashire distribution and storage company)

*"the idea now is to make the inspectors first line operators"*

(Quality manager of a medium sized East Lancashire Plastic Moulding company)

*"even the chaps in the warehouse who traditionally don't like paperwork are having to put pen to paper"*

(Managing Director of a small Cheshire plastics company)

Figure 10.7 shows the changes in basic skills needs in manual jobs in order of frequency in which they were mentioned.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Companies experiencing no changes to basic skills needs in manual jobs: | 17 | (25%) |
| Companies experiencing changes: | 50 | (75%) |
| Did not answer this question: | 6 | |
| Of the 50 experiencing changes, number experiencing changes in: | | |
| Quality standards: | 16 | (24%) |
| New technology: | 15 | (22%) |
| More and fuller documentation | 12 | (18%) |
| HASAW/COSHH | 8 | (12%) |
| New working procedures | 6 | (9%) |
| New equipment | 5 | (7%) |
| Metrication | 4 | (6%) |
| More report writing | 4 | (6%) |
| Raised customer expectations | 2 | (3%) |
| More detailed written instructions | 1 | (1%) |
| More volume of work | 1 | (1%) |
| Pressure to be more efficient, to have a greater understanding of the processes | 1 | (1%) |
| TOTAL | 75* | |

*sub total is more than 100% of 67: 22 companies mentioned more than one area where they were experiencing changes. Two companies reported that they had experienced changes but did not elaborate.

*Table 10.7. Changes faced by companies*

**5. Employers' perceived need for basic skills training**

Related to the previous two sections, it was relevant to ask whether the respondents saw a need for basic skills training: the response to this question would show whether the respondents felt that workers were commensurate to the changing communications skills tasks confronting them.

Out of those respondents who answered the question "Do you see a need for basic skills training within your company" (N=71), 28 (39%) could see a need for basic skills training in their companies after having considered the issue.

43 (61%) said they could not see a need for basic skills training. However, 14 out of those 43 respondents, (33%) having said that they did not see a need for basic skills classes on site, went on to cite specific incidents involving manual workers' basic skills needs.

One of these companies had just that week changed the content of a particular job so that a specific individual could be promoted to that job without his lack of writing skills getting in the way. This worker had been with the company for 25 years, without having to mention his writing difficulties.

> *"He had to, very sheepishly, come to us and say 'Well I don't think I'm capable of doing that', so we modified the job so he could copy information onto a production sheet, and he can do that fine. But to actually generate his own words in writing, he felt unable to do."*
>
> (Managing Director of a small Cheshire dyers)

So when he discovered that his new job would include writing, he was going to refuse the promotion, and it was only the company which had the idea of adapting the job to the individual.

Not all companies are so understanding. Several respondents said that people with poor basic skills were not taken on, or would not be kept on. In a steel stock holders, a welder had been dismissed after being promoted to salesman, as he could not cope with the increased paperwork required in his new job.

Another company was sending one of its workers to a private trainers on day release one afternoon a week to cover basic skills (mentioned above in the company profiles).

One respondent felt that some employees could benefit from basic skills training on an individual basis, but that the company would not benefit directly: *"Some of them could do with it, but we've no great need".*

Others stated that if the basic skills requirements of a specific job changed, they accepted that it would be up to them to train the workers in that job in the increased skills required.

| DO YOU SEE A NEED FOR BASIC SKILLS TRAINING WITHIN YOUR COMPANY? N = 71 | | |
|---|---|---|
| YES: | 28 | (39%) |
| NO: | 43 | (61%) |
| of those, existing 'deficiency' mentioned | 14 | (33%) |
| Did not answer this question | 2 | |
| TOTAL | 73 | |

*Table 10.8. Companies' perceived need for basic skills training*

**6. Companies' use of written tests for recruiting new employees.**

A study commissioned by the Employment Services (Hamilton & Davies 1990) looked at written barriers to employment, and found that many long-term unemployed people with literacy difficulties felt that there were unnecessary written tests set up by employers as barriers to their finding work, work which may not itself demand the same standards of writing as the application forms/tests demanded. This question (and, in fact, this whole research project) was informed by that study. It is related to the previous question; we have already mentioned that some companies felt that due to the high numbers of applicants for each job, and the high rate of unemployment, they could afford to be 'choosy'.

All the companies used an application form as part of their recruitment policy. However, some companies were happy to let people take them away and get them filled in at home, like the dyers mentioned above, who said:

> *"A lot of the jobs can be done without reading and writing skills. Everybody has to do a written application form, but we don't mind if they don't fill it in themselves if they don't have the ability. If it was for a job where they wouldn't need reading and writing skills we would show them where the emergency signs were and make sure they could understand those, but we wouldn't demand they fill in their own application forms."*

About two thirds of respondents answering this question (42, or 68%) said that they did not use a written test in addition to the application form for manual staff; about one third did so at least sometimes. 2 companies had not recruited any staff since the respondent had joined the company, and 11 other companies did not answer this question.

| DO YOU USE A WRITTEN TEST? N = 62 | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| YES | | 20 | (32%) |
| Sometimes | 8 | | |
| Always | 12 | | |
| NO | | 42 | (68%) |
| No response to this question | | 11 | |
| TOTAL | | | 73 |

*Table 10.9. Respondents' use of written tests in recruitment*

**7. Benefits of and blocks to workplace basic skills programmes.**

Respondents were asked what benefits they felt their company (or any company) would gain from workplace basic skills training; they were also asked what problems they felt there might be attached to this kind of training, or what might stop them from putting it on for their workforce. We have divided their (unprompted) answers into general themes, and these are illustrated and expanded upon in much more detail in Chapter Eleven: 'Benefits and Blocks', where we also look at actual benefits and problems which arose during our Case Studies. Figures do not add up to 100% of 73 as some respondents mentioned more than one item and some respondents did not mention any.

**8. Who the employers feel should pay for these schemes**

We asked employers, without prompting them, who they felt should be paying for such schemes. 58 companies answered this question: and there was a range of types of answer. These ranged from those who felt that it the company ought to pay for the whole of this kind of basic training (15 respondents, or 27%).

> *"The cost should be borne by the company: if the company can develop the individuals, the company would benefit from it"*
>
> (Personnel manager in a large engineering company)

to those who felt that it was up to the 'education system', or the state, to be providing industry with the kind of literate people it needed, or else to pay to remedy the situation (14 companies, or 24%):

> *"Not having paid for decent education in the first place it lies with the state to 'make good'... there is a need for training in ... English and writing due to the appalling standards of UK schools."*
>
> (Managing director of a small distributors)

**a: Benefits**

| | No. of respondents mentioning that benefit | |
|---|---|---|
| Greater accuracy | 9 | 12% |
| Improved promotion prospects | 8 | 11% |
| Adapting to change facilitated | 6 | 8.5% |
| Improved communication | 6 | 8.5% |
| Job enrichment | 5 | 7.5% |
| Improves company's image | 5 | 7.5% |
| Confidence building | 5 | 7.5% |
| Personal development | 3 | 4% |

**b. Blocks**

| | No. of respondents mentioning that block | |
|---|---|---|
| Lack of perceived need | 33 | 44% |
| Cost and time | 20 | 28% |
| Difficulty of convincing potential students that they have a need for such training | 12 | 17% |
| Lack of suitable training ethos within or across a company | 8 | 11% |
| Lack of available space at the workplace | 4 | 6% |
| Lack of opportunities for promotion within the company once people have better basic skills | 2 | 3% |
| Difficulty of monitoring its direct benefit | 2 | 3% |

*Table 10.10. Benefits and blocks cited by employers of workplace basic skills training schemes*

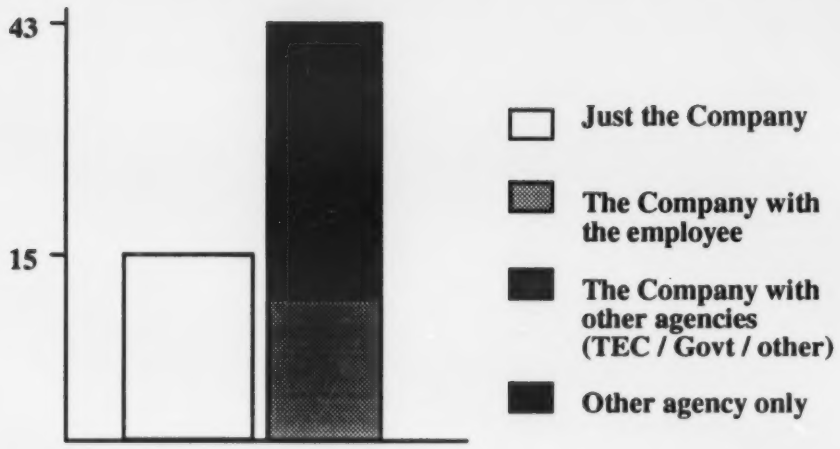



*Figure 10.11. Who respondents thought should pay for basic skills training schemes*

The largest group of respondents felt that though their company would pay some of the cost, they would appreciate it if other agencies such as Training and Enterprise Councils or the Local Authority, were to assist them (19 companies, or 33%).

> *"we could do with some help - which we are seeking from the local TEC"*
> (Personnel manager in a large furniture manufacturers and retailers).

One respondent mentioned the Industrial Training Board, and one mentioned the Unions, as organizations which should help to fund this kind of training. One company felt that the organizations which bring in regulations like increased Health and Safety requirements should pay for any increased training necessary in their implementation.

Finally, some employers felt that the employees themselves should pay at least part of the cost. (nine companies, or 16%).

So 43 respondents, i.e. nearly 75% of those who answered this question, would be looking for some other sources of funding for this kind of training, and do not feel ready, willing or able to fund it themselves.

**9. Awareness of workplace basic skills schemes.**

We asked employers whether they had heard of any companies running basic skills training schemes on site - assuming that if they had not, they would not be likely to run any such courses themselves.

Out of 66 who discussed this, only 14 said that they had heard of any kind of scheme of this sort. Three had a 'general knowledge' of such schemes but could not name any in particular: one had

information about such a scheme that the Plastics Industrial Training Board was promoting: one knew that the local TEC probably did that kind of training. One respondent knew that his neighbour got up early once a week to do a German class at his workplace, and four respondents named companies where workplace general education schemes were going on: Glaxo, Lucas (mentioned twice), Ford and a US firm, the Johnsonville Sausage Company.

| DO YOU KNOW OF ANY EXAMPLES OF WORKPLACE BASIC SKILLS TRAINING SCHEMES? (N=66) | |
|---|---|
| YES | NO |
| 14 | 52 |

*Table 10.12. Awareness of workplace basic skills training schemes*

**10. Interest in finding out more**

We asked respondents if they would be interested in finding out any more information about workplace basic skills training schemes (which could be information from our research, in written or seminar form, or information about who to contact in their local area about workplace basic skills training). Out of the 64 companies who responded to this question, only 11 (18%) said that they did not want further information, though of those 53 companies who said that they would like to hear more, several made comments to the effect that they probably wouldn't do anything about it, and most said that they wouldn't have time to go through a long report, but might be interested in a short fact-sheet or leaflet.

This survey acted as a small awareness-raising exercise in itself, for ourselves as well as for the respondents. During the life of the project, we have been contacted by several workers from different colleges who had to do a good 'sales' job, meeting targets of providing so many courses in so many companies as part of their job. We felt in a more comfortable position by the end of our survey than were those workers. By the end of the data collection period we felt that awareness-raising, let alone 'sales', would be a very long - but not impossible - process.

# Part Four:

# Synthesis

# Chapter Eleven:

## Benefits and Blocks

---

## What's the Bottom Line

Before introducing workplace basic skills training into a company, many personnel managers have to ask "What's in it for us?". They have to justify the cost of the training to their boards and their budget holders, who will ask them the same question. In the recession, many companies (though not all) have cut their training budget. The scheme has to be seen to improve production levels or service provided, and the fact that it may well be of benefit to individual students may or may not be an issue for consideration.

In the employer survey, respondents - most of whom were not providing such training - were asked what they felt would be the benefits of, and the problems arising from, providing basic skills training at the workplace. Their ideas divided roughly into eight different benefits and seven different blocks.

To complement this information, in the three case studies, and in the other schemes we looked at in the UK, managers and students were asked to think about what benefits and what problems had come up both for the company and for individuals as a result of the workplace training schemes. Each of the different themes where the employers felt that workplace basic skills courses would be of benefit, were borne out by examples from students, managers and/or trade union representatives. In the case of the potential problems the employers felt might arise, some of these came up in the cases and were resolved: and some other problems also arose during the course of the programmes, which were dealt with as the scheme went along.

Each different area is laid out below, together with stories in the voices of managers, students, shop stewards and tutors from the case study sites.

**Benefits**

1. Greater accuracy
2. Improved promotion prospects
3. Facilitation of change
4. Improved communication
5. Job enrichment
6. Improving the company's image
7. Confidence building
8. Personal development

**Blocks**

1. Lack of perceived need
2. Lack of suitable training ethos within or across a company
3. Cost and time
4. Difficulty of convincing potential students that they have a need for basic skills training
5. Lack of available space at the workplace
6. Lack of opportunities for promotion within the company once people have better skills
7. Difficulty of monitoring its direct benefit

Additional blocks which arose during the course of the programmes:

8: Problems for students from work colleagues and/or supervisors
9: Lack of opportunities for students for progression within work time
10: High turnover of tutors

The figures given below are based on respondents' responses to questions about the benefits and the blocks there might be to putting on workplace basic skills courses. They were not given any 'prompts', which means the answers they gave were the ones they had in their minds when they were talking to us. If, therefore, 20 respondents are cited as feeling that there was a particular benefit to be gained from putting on this kind of training, it does not necessarily mean that the other 53 did *not* feel their company would gain this benefit: just that it wasn't mentioned.

## Section One: Benefits

### 1. Accuracy - Elimination of Errors

Nine respondents in the employer survey (12%) felt that this kind of training would mean less errors, improved accuracy within the job, and would mean less supervision would be needed.

> "*Less rework due to reduced errors*" (managing director of medium sized industrial vacuum pump manufacturers)

> "*There would be less need to have work checked*" (human resources manager in a medium sized manufacturing research and development consultancy)

> "*Simple tasks would be correct - pallets would have the right quantities on*" (quality manager of a medium sized plastic moulding company)

Several respondents mentioned younger workers' lack of ability to use a calculator; more than one mentioned the fact that young people would fail to return the calculator to zero at the start of transactions.

The metrication courses at all three main case study sites and the maths classes all used materials and examples from the shop floor, and all included practice with use of a calculator and exercises in use of the decimal point.

Although it is difficult to give completely accurate 'before and after' evidence to prove that accuracy is improved after basic skills courses, the interviews we carried out with students and managers in the Case Study sites point to some students feeling that they had made real improvements in their 'on-the-job' performance, and they feel that their accuracy at work has increased. One case study site, Richards & Appleby, felt that there was a noticeable increase in accuracy in one area in particular, with other areas also showing improvements.

> "*Before the classes we had approximately 30% error on issues of components from the warehouse to the line: after the training we had a 6% error*".
>
> (Personnel manager, Richards & Appleby)

> *"At work, I have to multiply how many things there are on the pallets. ... I used to use a calculator or get someone else to do it. I can't spend lots of time doing it with or without a calculator. For example, we've got to get 50,000 lipsticks out. If they're in packs of 6, how many pallets will I need?"*
>
> (Student, Richards & Appleby).

> *"I'm an extruder driver. There's lots of measuring in that. The course has helped my understanding."*
>
> (Student, BICC)

**2. Improved Promotion Prospects**

8 respondents (11%) in the employer survey felt that this kind of training would help students to get better jobs, and to move up within the company. Although two companies expressed the view that they didn't want to train workers who would then go off and get better jobs elsewhere, most accepted this risk and set it against the benefits which would arise from having better trained and qualified workers.

> "*You may get a good craft person that could make a good supervisor if they could remove the barrier of illiteracy and innumeracy and by removing that barrier you've got a potential supervisor."*
>
> (Training manager in a large hotel group)

> *"On the foreman level, he wouldn't have had a formal training in how to communicate with people as opposed to on an individual basis."*
>
> (Commercial manager in a small distribution company)

Within the case studies, students talked about how the courses helped them in making job applications and in performance in higher level jobs:

*"Doing a CV was helpful"*
(Student, Richards & Appleby)

*"It's been beneficial all round. ... It would help if I go for another job for example"*
(Student, BICC)

*"I've been promoted to audit quality control. I might as well ... make the learning beneficial to the company. It has been he'pful in work."*
(Student, Baxi)

*"My new job involves more report writing. I might have filled a time sheet in before, but I haven't done any education for twenty years - if you don't use it, you lose it. ... I wanted to cover business letters, notes, messages and proof reading".*
(Student, Baxi)

Several workers at Sheffield City Council talked about the Take Ten courses starting them off on the road to other courses and promotion, and helping them within the organization:

*"Other people have professional groups, whereas I actually came in as a labourer, so therefore you have nothing to start with, and it was basically the start of your growing in the city council. ... The Take Ten course helped me improve my communication, it's given me the confidence to pursue my ambition, which was to be a land surveyor."*
(Alan Webb, surveying technician, Sheffield City Council )

*"I just feel now that, because I've found I have got a brain, and it works better than I ever thought it did, that I would do quite a lot. I've been in cooking all my life, and I thoroughly enjoy being a cook, I don't feel any different to people who have got a higher job than I have, but I am seriously thinking of going into social work, and I'd like to do it within the juvenile system, because a lot of people think they're not as bright, I think they're a great set of kids, so I feel that if I take my education that bit further it will help me besides helping who I work for as well."*
(Maria Smith, cook, Sheffield City Council)

**3. Adapting to Change**

Six respondents in the employer survey (8.5%) mentioned that this kind of training would help students to adapt to current or forthcoming changes, to become more flexible: with the idea of promoting a 'learning culture' within the organization where workers would not be afraid to take on new ideas. The training could also be used as 'learning support' for other courses.

*"As technology moves so fast, people will have to relearn their skills maybe every three or four years"*
(Education Liaison Officer in a large pharmaceuticals firm)

*"If there's a change taking place that your workforce can't cope with, it would obviously be much better to have the devil you know than the devil you don't know"*
(Training manager in a large steel stockholding company).

*"It gives them a bit more time to learn, and the pressure's off".*
(Engineering training manager at a large fuel processing plant)
[talking about learning support for students on another course]

Each of the Case Study companies had been making changes in their procedures and in each company the courses were found to be having an effect on the way that the changes were being accepted by the workers.

*"In general the overall skills level is increasing and many people are taking the right level of advantage of the scheme. Even some of the 'stickers' have responded now. This means they may be ready at a different time to take on new skills and training when those new skills are considered normal."*
(Manager, Baxi)

*"We are looking to carry on with the training when new regulations, new requirements, new Health and Safety laws and new processes need to be thought through."*
(Manager, Richards & Appleby)

*"I'm on two CIT's* [continuous improvement teams] *- quality and production. ... In the quality team I discuss quality faults, I take notes and take them back to the production team. The team leader doesn't chair or take minutes necessarily, it rotates."*
(Student, Baxi)

*"More written capabilities are needed in my department and these are growing. For example, people have responded better than expected to the computers. They were introduced eight or nine years ago and used by the people in the offices; the storekeepers would just come in and tell the people in the offices what to key in. But now the storekeepers are starting to operate the computers themselves."*
(Manager, BICC)

*"I have opportunities at works meetings taking minutes. I wouldn't have dared before. Now I will have the confidence to do it and I want to do it."*
(Student, Baxi).

Some students were using the courses as 'Learning Support' with other College programmes.

*"The beauty about it is, if you are doing an outside course, you are having problems, you can bring it into the learning centre and do it in there, because you've got tutors from college"*
(Baxi shop steward)

*"I'm doing CADCAM at college, and this course helps. I had to write a seven page report. Sue* [the tutor] *went through it with me."*

(Student, Baxi)

**4. Improved Communication**

Six respondents (8.5%) mentioned that they felt reports would be written better, and communication between departments, to and from management, and to and from customers, would improve with workplace basic skills programmes.

*"It would lead to a better relationship between departments"*

(Personnel manager in a small engineering packing company)

*"If employees learn communication skills at all levels, not just filtering down from the top, if the information can be passed up to the top as well, then I think that messages coming from management have more credibility ... management will be more willing to listen to what's coming from the shop floor."*

(Personnel manager in a large aeronautical engine component manufacturer)

In the Case Studies, both management and students felt that all aspects of communication had improved:

*"For BS5750 I'm doing a one off job at the moment: writing down details of each job starting from the beginning ... 'you cut off the cable at 30 cm...' So I have to analyse each job and write out instructions. Then I get someone who can't do the job to do it to see if it's clear. If not, I start again. I'm doing English in the classes."*

(Student, BICC)

*"Two way communication has started. Instead of just blind acceptance the workers ask questions when you say something. It shows more awareness ... So they're no longer shy or afraid to ask."*

(Manager, Richards & Appleby)

*"There's not a lot of report writing in my new job but there will be later. ... Those reports go to my boss and it looks more professional if it's done well."*

(Student, Baxi).

*"In terms of health and safety, communication of information, they are more aware. They are able to appreciate their role and protect themselves. There are certain warnings on COSHH* [control of substances hazardous to health]. *And they take more notice of them now."*

(Manager, Richards & Appleby)

*"It helps fill time sheets in for breakdowns - spelling and paragraphs. I need to pass on to other shifts what I've done, so they can see quickly and simply. Instead of doing it longwindedly I do it briefly and to the point."*

(Student, Baxi).

At Sheffield, students from the Take Ten courses also talked about improved communications skills:

> *"Well, good communication always helps, it stops arguments at source, I suppose, where you can sit down and talk a thing through."*
>
> (Alan Webb, Surveying Technician, Sheffield City Council)

> *"It's not helped directly in the work that I actually do, but it has given me more confidence, and I feel that I've got better communications skillls through it... ours is an isolated job, where you don't see your colleagues very much, you're just dealing with clients, and I feel I can communicate a lot better with them, I've got more confidence to talk more freely with them ...*
>
> *It's changed me that I'll be better, I think, at putting over my point of view as an employee, so it's benefitted me from both sides, you know. But I think I'm also a better worker from going on the course, I think I've got more understanding of people in general."*
>
> (Sharon Kimpton, Home Help, Sheffield City Council)

**5. Job Enrichment**

Five respondents (7% of the sample of employers) talked in terms of participants' jobs becoming more enriched, people getting a better idea of how their job fitted in to a whole, people being more fulfilled, more motivated and more involved in their jobs, and increasingly likely to want to 'give something back', by making suggestions for improvements.

> *"It would lead to job enrichment, and a greater understanding of why people are doing a mundane job"*
>
> (Operations Director of a large soft furnishings company)

> *"It would bring the awareness level higher"*
>
> (Production manager of a large electrical engineering company)

This was definitely felt to be a successful area of benefit of the classes by interviewees in the Case Studies.

> *"With the new working routine, if another department stops because of my department, that department can bill us. So if I'm more educated, I can work out why and what can go wrong."*
>
> (Student, Baxi)

> *"People have a more open mind to what's going on. People have started to ask how it's going to affect them - for example, when another business comes to look at the factory, it needs to be efficient looking and that will win contracts. I believe* [the course] *has made a difference."*
>
> (Manager, Richards & Appleby)

At Sheffield, students from the Take Ten scheme talked about having a better idea of how the Council worked:

> *"I think I've got a more balanced idea, about how the council works, and I appreciate better now the difficulties that they have to cope with, I've got more understanding about each department."*
>
> (Sharon Kimpton, Home Help, Sheffield City Council)

As described in Chapter Seven: 'The Case Studies', Baxi Heating introduced a Continuous Improvement Programme after their education scheme started, with workers divided into CITs, or Continuous Improvement Teams. Under the 'Profit Improvement Programme', all employees are encouraged to put forward 'PIPs' to reduce costs and waste. As mentioned in the case study chapter, the Financial Manager of the company has every reason to believe that it is the education programme which has helped to guarantee the success of this new management style. As quoted above, he says:

> *"The fact that we've had this training has given all the employees in CIT teams the confidence and ability to analyse business problems. They would never have got involved without maths training. The CITs have helped to deliver cost savings which over the last 18 months have been quite substantial. It can't be proved that it's because of the scheme, but I feel it is, because it means everyone can go on board."*
>
> (Manager, November 1992)

The 'Baxi Partner', the 'journal of the Baxi Partnership', included a page in its March, 1992 issue, giving examples of some of the cost- and waste-saving ideas, or 'PIPs' which partners had come up with:

> *"A method of producing prototype castings that reduces dramatically the development time of castings, i.e. White Boilers save £52,000 this year".*
>
> *"Selling of unuseable off cuts and utilisation of scrap - £10,000."*
>
> *"Removal of flat nuts from VP door assembly - £400."*

One Take Ten student talked about the courses' encouraging people to put forward their ideas:

> "[good communication] ... *enables people to put their ideas forward, good ideas, which certainly would improve productivity, and leads you on into further education, so therefore you become a better tradesman or whatever, which benefits you both".*
>
> (Alan Webb, Surveying Technician, Sheffield City Council)

One student, when asked to think about benefits that her company would gain from the classes, said:

*"I don't think work benefits, but in the long run, like, we might be getting that clever we'd come up with suggestions that might help the Company".*

This student made this remark facetiously, not thinking for a minute that that situation could ever arise. We aren't sure whether the doubt in her mind was lack of confidence that she could ever come up with any such ideas, or doubt that the company would listen to her if she did put such ideas forward. What is clear is that companies who do listen to suggestions from their workers see the benefits reflected in their 'bottom lines', but that the workers need encouragement and training to be able to express their suggestions clearly and effectively. In fact, it may be inferred that some managers need training themselves in the art of listening to the people who actually do the job.

**6. Improves the Company's Image**

Respondents who mentioned this area of potential benefit of workplace learning schemes (5 respondents, or 7%) felt that providing this kind of training would give the company a more 'caring' image in the eyes of its employees, who would feel more valued, and thus more inclined to give more back.

*"It would make people feel more valued so more committed to you as an employer"*
(Housing training officer in a large City Council)

*"If you can make it a bit more enjoyable ... the incentive might be a happier and more forward looking workforce"*
(Production director in a medium sized footwear manufacturers)

The Case Studies pointed in the same directions.

*"The individual benefits more than the Company which I think is right. But there is a good spin-off for the company when individuals benefit. The company pays for benefits but my view and, I hope, the company's view, is that not every piece of training needs to directly benefit the company. I believe in putting people in a new environment. So there's no direct benefit, but it lifts people's morale, which will lead to new ideas. If people are properly treated as though they are human beings, they will respond in kind. There are hidden benefits in people's attitudes, approach, and with people feeling comfortable in their environment."*
(Manager, BICC)

*"Maths and English are only one element. Sending people on any class makes them feel they're considered important so that it's not just supervisors and managers who are eligible for training. ... I would hope that it shows that they're appreciated as human beings ... It indirectly benefits the company, while benefitting them as individuals."*
(Manager, Richards & Appleby)

**7. Confidence Building**

Five respondents (7%) mentioned the increased confidence that they felt would come out of this kind of training.

> *"Confidence - which would increase sales"*
> (sales manager of a large electrical stores group)

More or less every student interviewed in the three case studies, and each manager, referred to the increase in confidence which had arisen from the courses. This confidence has been of benefit in different areas of people's lives - at work and at home:

> *"It gives you greater confidence as well, in whatever you're doing, English wise. Before, you may have tried to avoid something - you know you're capable - you tackle something you wouldn't have tackled before."*
> (Student, Baxi)

> *"It builds your confidence up"*
> (Student, BICC)

> *"You get more confidence at the end of the day. There were two quiet women and I was surprised - they weren't as thick as I thought they were!"*
> (Student, BICC)

> *"One person has started night classes. He had no confidence before. There have been remarkable improvements. It has awakened latent talent and new ideas."*
> (Manager, BICC)

Students at Sheffield also talked about increasing confidence:

> *"I think it just makes you more able to join in with everyone else, and give your views, even if a lot of people do not agree with you, you put your point of view across and you're not toeing to everyone, just say what you like, it gives you more confidence to do that"*
> (Jennifer Cussens, Residential Social Worker, Sheffield City Council)

***8. Personal Development***

3 respondents (4%) mentioned the benefits to participants' own personal development:

> *"People may have left school too early and regretted it, and got onto the treadmill of having to work and finding it difficult to get time off and finding the incentive and motivation to do it outside of work. Given the opportunity at no inconvenience to them, it might spur them on to widening their horizons and do more for themselves."*
> (Production director in a large footwear company).

Within the case studies, this was a major benefit mentioned by all parties in all the cases. Students talked about the benefits they had gained for themselves, and managers talked about the benefits to the company of giving something to workers for their own benefit.

> *"Offering people something extra for their own personal development leads to more commitment, participation and contribution".*
>
> (Manager, Baxi)

> *"My son is just 13, going on 14. They're doing maths that I never even did at school, so hopefully I will be able to help him later on."*
>
> (Student, Baxi)

The benefits of the scheme to the older learner was mentioned by a BICC shop steward, discussed in more detail above in Chapter Six: 'The Case Studies'. He felt that giving this group of workers an interest and an ambition, showing them that they could still learn, would solve some of the problems they had in filling their time once they retired.

And an anonymous participant at our residential weekend for students, realising that people are often defined by their jobs, wrote:

> *"I plan to show people I am not just a number, and I am willing to go further on in my education to prove I can be a somebody."*

## Section Two: Blocks to Setting up Workplace Learning Schemes

## Part One: Blocks Mentioned by Survey Respondents

The potential problems which follow are those specifically mentioned by employers, unprompted, when we asked what problems might arise connected to workplace basic skills programmes, or what might stop them putting on such training.

### 1. Lack of Perceived Need for Such Training

33 employers, or 44% of our sample, told us that they had no need for basic skills training. The answers, however, tended to fall into two distinct categories. The first implied that the workers had good standards of literacy and numeracy and that basic skills training would not be of benefit to them (although several of the companies giving this answer then went on to talk about problems that had come up at work related to basic skills 'deficiencies'); and the second, that the workers had no need of basic skills while they were at work, and therefore training them in basic skills would be of no benefit to the organization.

In the first group, responses tended to be similar to the one given by the director of a small mechanical handling equipment manufacturers:

> *"we have no need at the moment: people are satisfying requirements".*

An example of the second type of answer was the managing director of a medium sized textile company who told us:

> *"Because of the nature of the business, I have a tendency to get a type of person who is very ... sometimes difficult to employ because of the education that they might have had ... they don't have to have a great deal of brain power to do the job, and I have never thought of giving employees additional training to enhance their prospects ... I don't need a high skill level, not with the type of work they are undertaking."*

A response to this second issue from within the case studies might be that several students - and managers - felt that although they could not apply the benefits of the courses directly to their job, they felt that the increased confidence and awareness gained would be of benefit to the company indirectly.

For example, in response to the question: "What about the course in terms of your work? Has it changed the way you've been working?" Sharon Kimpton, a Home Help with Sheffield City Council, said:

> *"It's not changed it directly, reflected in the work that I do, but it's changed me personally in that I feel that I've got better communication with people, I feel more open, I can discuss things a lot freer. ... I think I've got a more balanced idea about how the council works, and I appreciate better now the difficulties that they have to cope with, I've got more understanding, about each department."*

The employer responses in the fifth 'benefit', above, that dealing with job enrichment, also address this question.

**2. Lack of Suitable Training Ethos Within or Across a Company**

Of 30 interviewees who responded to the question, 8 (36%) said this kind of training would not fit in with their current training structure or ethos, or would not be a priority area. It is necessary for a whole company to take this kind of training on board: if only one manager or section shares its aims it will not thrive. One respondent gave a hint of the problems that this could cause, saying that if trainees came back from the courses and submitted reports for the management, they would be ignored, which would lead to frustration.

At BICC, out of managers of three units, two introduced the scheme and were supportive of it, and the third felt that 'for business reasons' he did not want to pursue this course. This caused problems on site as it meant that some sections of the workforce were able to benefit from the scheme, and some were not: with no possibilities of negotiation.

**3. Cost and Time**

(Mentioned by 20 repondents in the employer survey - 28%)

The biggest perceived barrier to setting up workplace basic skills classes is their potential cost, both in terms of direct costs of tutoring, and in lost production from the workforce attending classes in work time.

In answer to our question about "what problems or disadvantages could you see in putting on basic English or Maths classes at work" those who mentioned cost or time included issues like loss of production:

> *"Time, mainly: I have a problem at the moment ... once you've taken people off the shop-floor they are not producing any wealth for the company."*
>
> (Works director in a small packaging company)

They mentioned the amount of time such training would take up:

> *"simply the difficulty of fitting in such training."*
>
> (manufacturing supervisor of a medium sized company making liquid coatings for the building trade)

Related to 'cost and time', two companies felt that they didn't want to train people who would then leave: for example the managing director of a medium sized textile company who told us:

> *"... my experience has been that at times we have lost more literate drivers once they have actually been certificated, to larger companies in the area, and I don't wish my company to become a training ground for larger companies."*

At BICC, the manager we spoke to told us:

> *"The restriction is finance. If the business is not doing well, we can't put on this scheme."*

In our interview with Richards & Appleby's Senior Technical Manager, we were told:

> *"We have to plan production round it. It lowers production levels in the short term. It has been planned around. For example, we've lowered targets. So far we've just about managed. It's come at a bad time in the recession when we're looking at minimizing costs. But at the same time, that could make it the 'right time' so they'll be ready when the time comes. ... No-one anticipated the current lack of contracts. ... more people would have been hired if we'd have had more contracts so percentage wise the loss of production should have been lower."*

At Baxi, the management felt that the benefits of the scheme outweighed the costs, and the manager quoted below linked the loss of production from the courses to that caused as a matter of course by holidays or sickness.

*"It's a drain on the production department, giving the time. It's not the expense of the classes, but the expense of releasing people. Our attitude to it is 'it may cause problems, but people can do overtime or we can bring in other workers on other shifts.' We never identify it* [problems with loss of production] *as being because of the open learning centre. It could be for other reasons, for example, to do with the workload, replacing people who are off sick or on holiday. I haven't heard any negative reactions."*

In an attempt to resolve some of these problems, Baxi Heating like some other companies run their Open Learning scheme half in company time, half in the students' own time. At a seminar for local companies thinking about putting on this kind of scheme in November 1992, Graham Bettany, Baxi Human Resources manager, said:

*"Trying to negotiate a shared time arrangement cuts costs, confirms commitment for employees, and helps achieve acceptance from non-participants, and that's very very important."*

**4. Difficulty of Convincing Potential Students That They Have a Need for Basic Skills Training**

(Mentioned by 12 respondents in the employer survey - 17%)

Twelve respondents felt that there was a stigma attached to basic skills training which would mean that workers would be unlikely to come forward to take part in the training willingly: for example the production manager of a medium sized electrical engineering company, who said:

*"I don't know how people would react to you ... more or less telling them they are illiterate."*

In the case studies, as the schemes continued, more people came forward once they had found out from colleagues what the courses consisted of. It is true, however, that throughout the life of the courses there were people who still had that fear of going through the door. Only time, encouragement by the tutors and the company, and a positive attitude towards the scheme from all concerned can help.

**5. Lack of Available Space at the Workplace**

Four companies (6%) mentioned this issue, including one company which did all its work on customer sites and had no available space for its own training. Small companies are less likely to have a dedicated 'training' space for this kind of work to take place.

*"We are too small to have space for training in the workplace."*
(Managing director of a small instrumentation distributors).

At Fleetwood Funeral Home, a small employer with a workforce of around 8, the individual worker who was receiving the training went to a training organization's premises once a week for classes. At Sheffield City Council's Take Ten scheme, workers from all over the city, from

different jobs ranging from home help to caretaker, school cleaner to traffic warden, attend classes in the same place, on one day a week for ten weeks. An individual's particular workplace might well be too small for a training scheme of its own, but pooling the training needs of the council helped to provide premises and finances. In this kind of situation, the classes tend to last for a whole morning or afternoon at least, as it is no longer a matter of 'nipping away from the shop floor for a couple of hours'.

**6. Lack of Opportunities for Promotion Within the Company Once People Have Better Skills**
(Mentioned by 2 respondents in the employer survey - 3%)

It was suggested that if employees were given the opportunity to gain more qualifications and skills, it would lead to frustration if there were no opportunities for progression for them within the company.

> *"People might expect too much, they might feel they've been asked about their aspirations, then get bored before anything comes their way".*
> (Training officer in a large biscuit factory).

It was acknowledged within each Case Study that students might use the courses to help them move on, perhaps to move away from the company as well as within it: but it was felt that the positive training policy might go some way towards attracting a good calibre of new recruits which would counteract this disadvantage. In addition, at Baxi, for example, some students were quite happy to remain in their job and use the course as 'escapism', to help them to play with their grandchildren on the computer for example. And some companies have admitted that the learning can be seen as a way of compensating their workers for an otherwise repetitive weekly routine.

**7. Difficulty of Monitoring its Direct Benefit**
(Mentioned by 2 respondents in the employer survey - 3%)

If one group of managers or trade unionists, or an individual in a company, wants to promote this kind of training, the question that is going to be asked is 'what's the bottom line' - and it is felt that the kind of benefit to be derived from this kind of course is intangible and 'invisible'.

> *"Difficult to see its effects straight away"*
> (Regional Personnel Manager of a large chain of electrical retail stores.)

As mentioned above under 'finance', at least one Case Study company felt that the improvements were measurable. Three years after the scheme at Baxi first started, one of their senior financial managers told us (as mentioned above in the Case Study section):

> *"The fact that we've had this training has given all the employees in CIT teams the confidence and ability to analyse business problems. They would never have got involved without maths training. The CITs have helped to deliver cost savings which over the last 18 months have been quite substantial. It can't be proved that it's because of the scheme, but I feel it is, because it means everyone can go on board."*

## Part Two: Blocks Arising in the Case Studies

The 'blocks' listed above are those which were expressed by employers as reasons which might put them off setting up workplace basic skills training, or problems which they would envisage coming up if they did put such training on at work. All are very real situations, which the companies which did set up such schemes had to address in one way or another.

It is not, of course, all plain sailing once the schemes are set up. Various problems arise: we have abstracted and 'merged' those which follow from the three main Case Studies and from the other settings we have examined. Where these exist we have included ways in which the schemes concerned have attempted to overcome these problems.

### 8. Overcoming Attitudes from Colleagues and Supervisors

During one set of presentations, there was some 'heckling' from the floor, when one of the workers started jeering at others who were asking the tutors for information about the courses.

One Maths tutor told us that she knew that one of her students, in particular, was having great difficulties with his foreman, which made it difficult at first for him to leave the shop floor and come to classes. She felt that he and other students were called 'a bit stupid' by their fellow workers. Elderly workers were attending the classes with younger ones, and she knew that they were getting comments from colleagues asking why they were bothering at their age. She felt that that attitude had become less noticeable over time, and could only improve as the classes went on.

In one case a student was having problems with his foreman's attitude to the courses. He showed him details of the course that he was doing, and details of other courses running at the college: shortly after that the foreman himself enrolled for a computing course at the college, and began to support the student with his learning.

The 'Goldfish Bowl' syndrome at Baxi, where everyone could see who was going to the classes originally when they took place in a glass-walled room in the centre of the shop floor, led to lots of negative comments from workmates - the Open Learning Centre's situation away from the factory floor has helped with this problem, but people still hear comments about the 'early learning centre'.

At Brooke Bond Oxo, one of the students told us:

> *"We found that most people wanted to go on the courses but were afraid to go on them, because they were frightened of what the other people, you know, their colleagues, were saying to you, saying that you were a bit slow, you couldn't read, you couldn't write, and basically we went to improve on our own skills which we knew we had to improve on."*

As in this example, the more confident student will overcome these difficulties. However for those students with low self-esteem, who find it hard to go to classes anyway, this kind of attitude from colleagues could put the students off taking up the courses at all.

### 9. Lack of Opportunities for Progression in Work Time

Most of the schemes we looked at were finite, with a 12 week course being offered in, say, metrication, and then the only opportunities to progress to any other education opportunities being by going on to evening classes, which might or might not be paid for by the employer.

Out of sixteen questionnaires filled in by students at Richards & Appleby, five answered the question "how could the courses be improved" with some variation of "they could be longer".

At Brooke Bond, one student said:

> *"we didn't think there was enough time given to us to be able to attend these courses, the majority of courses we had to attend in our own time, but then after work there wasn't enough time to research, to find anything out, so this was one of the major problems ..."*

At Sheffield 'Take Ten', students are informed about courses which they can go on to after those first ten days. Many were able to take up these opportunities but we spoke to some students whose managers were unwilling for them to take more time out of work, or for them to change their shifts round so that they could attend classes in their own time.

At Baxi Heating, the courses at the Open Learning centre in English and Maths are now 'roll-on, roll-off', so people can join at any time, depending on space: in addition the company is sponsoring students to attend evening classes at the local further education college in any subject, in their own time: this opportunity has been taken up by a large proportion of the workforce.

### 10. Tutor Turnover

Most ABE tutors teaching on the Case Study schemes were part-time, with short-term contracts which could be ended by a week's notice on either side. This caused problems particularly at one of our sites, where there was a high turnover of tutors, who would often be applying for permanent, or at least full-time, jobs, while working on the training schemes. In addition, they would usually be working for a college convenient to their homes: but the workplace sites would be at some distance from the college, and often the tutors - usually women - would have to travel by public transport and/or at unsocial hours, which caused some problems.

> *"Changing teachers didn't help. You get used to one. It takes you a while to take to a new one - to get to know her"*
> (Student, BICC)

In Chapter 12, 'Issues for Examination', we attempt to draw together some of the issues which have come up in the case studies and the survey. Our recommendations, in Chapter 13, draw on these issues.

# Chapter Twelve

## Issues for Examination

### 1. Information

It can be seen from the employer survey that most employers are unaware of the few workplace basic skills schemes which do exist. A company which is not aware of this kind of provision is extremely unlikely to launch such a scheme spontaneously, from within, however great its need.

A concerted campaign of publicity for such schemes, mounted by the government, colleges and other trainers, the TECs and LECs, ALBSU, NIACE, Workbase, the Trades Unions, and employer organizations, would help to raise awareness of such schemes.

Some joint events organized between the CBI, the TUC, and ALBSU, over the past few years (for example see ALBSU (a) 1990), with various speakers (including Baxi Heating's Human Resources Department), have attracted a large audience drawn from industry. The Employment Department has commissioned some studies of 'employee development' schemes (Metcalf, 1992 and others). ALBSU has commissioned some research on different workplace basic skills schemes, and has just produced a video on the subject (ALBSU 1993).

However, the managers who need to be reached are those who are not prepared to travel to a seminar, who would not order a research report, who would not spend the time watching a video and who may only be at a very preliminary stage of defining their training needs. Perhaps the only way to reach them is through general articles in the mainstream business press, radio and TV.

### 2. Universal Access

*2.1 All companies*

Research carried out on training opportunities for manual workers (Training Agency, 1989, and others quoted above: see Chapter Two) shows that manual workers receive the least amount of training at work in the UK. It is worth reminding ourselves of the figures quoted earlier:

> *"the reported percentage of unskilled and semi-skilled workers over 35 years old having had <u>any</u> training in the past three years was 11% in 1987".*
> (Training Agency, 1989, our emphasis).

Full participation in the company processes by all workers can only be achieved if basic communications skills training is made available to manual workers.

In those companies introducing major changes, for example

- teamworking and other schemes aiming to increase worker participation in decision-making;
- computerization;
- cashless pay;
- national quality standards such as BS5750 or Investors in People
- the government's National Education & Training Targets;

a significant percentage of the workforce will be insufficiently confident in the use of the core communication skills, and will be excluded from the changes if training is not offered to them. Of a cohort of 17,000 people who were aged 23 in 1987, a study found that 13% of them, or one in seven, felt that they had an inadequate grasp of basic skills (Hamilton, 1987): and with such a large survey, it is likely that this percentage would not be highly different within a large organization (although some research commissioned by ALBSU into the basic skills of a group of 21 year old adults all born in one week of 1970 suggest that particularly in the case of men, those with poor literacy skills were three times as likely to be unemployed as the men in the group as a whole (ALBSU (b), 1993)).

*Introduction of Change*

As any consultant helping to implement change in an organisation will tell us, people need help and training to understand and cope with change, which otherwise leads to stress and a perceived threatening situation. This is as valid when the change in question involves persuading senior managers to allow manual staff to attend training courses, as it does when it is the more usual question of management wanting to implement a change in working conditions, flexibility, cashless pay, etc.

Carol Munelly, writing about the introduction of Japanese style worker participation programmes in American companies, says:

> *"All too often a pre-packaged program is introduced into a company, but usually not in response to the need for individuals to be involved in their work. The 'installation' of Quality Circles in an organisation not ready to deal with the results or the consequences of worker participation does not provide the workforce with access or with opportunities to influence the decision-making process."*
>
> (Munelly, 1987, p80-81)

It can be seen from Baxi Heating that participation in the 'Continuous Improvement Teams' has been active and positive throughout the company: and to some extent at least, the courses have been an influencing factor in this, allowing access to all stages of the process to all workers. Munelly talks about the importance of workers' having the basic skills to take part in this kind of activity:

*"Historically workers have not participated in company decision-making processes, and as a result are not equipped for this by experience. Despite some attempts to train workers for these new programs, workers are often expected to become proficient in these processes almost overnight when the company decides to share decision-making.*

*Decision-making requires a set of skills and perspectives which managers have had a chance to practice, but workers have not. Workers are usually narrowly trained for technical skill competence. On the other hand, managers at all levels receive leadership and other kinds of special training for their roles. They also have on-the-job experience through committee meetings, problem solving, and management planning sessions, all of which are ongoing opportunities to participate in shaping the company's future. Without similar training or experience, non-managers need to receive a form of management training to participate in company decision-making."*

(ibid, p.82)

The experience at Baxi, and to some extent at the other two case study sites, indicates that as long as non-managers are given some kind of training in the basic tools which are needed in order to participate effectively in meetings - note-taking skills, reading and understanding of charts, diagrams and reports, and effective presentation/intervention skills - and as long as their managers are listening to them - they are able to use their own knowledge and experience, as workers actually doing the job, to contribute to the decision-making process.

There were only four respondents in our employer survey who reported that no reading, writing and mathematics were necessary for the manual tasks in their companies, and each of those mentioned that the staff were still expected to read health and safety notices, and/or calculate their wages sheets. This leads us to surmise that whatever the company and the occupation, most workers have to use some basic skills at work: if not in their actual work, then at the least, in carrying out related tasks. So every company would benefit by an improvement in the basic skills of their workforce: in addition to the personal benefits which would be felt by the workers involved.

### *2.2 All groups of workers*

Women workers in manual jobs have even less chance of receiving training than the eleven percent of *all* manual workers cited above; and part-timers fare even worse. An Equal Opportunities Commission report, quoted in Payne, 1991, concluded that:

*"Although the proportion of women receiving job-related training has increased over the last decade, the unmet demand for training is substantial amongst older women and amongst women who are poorly qualified. ... In addition, women in part-time jobs were shown to have only half the chances that women working full-time have of getting training. ...".*

(Clarke, 1991, our emphasis)

Within the case studies, particularly BICC, it can be seen that the issue of access to the education opportunity offered was a different one in the case of the shift-workers (all men), and the 'Cords' workers (all women).

The shift-workers were able to come to classes which were organised at the end of their shift, partly in work time and partly in their own time. In the case of rolling, four- or six-day shift patterns, some workers were only able to attend classes every two, three or four weeks, but occasionally those students who lived near to the worksite came in on their days off, and many would collect work to do at home which would be marked for them before their next visit.

When there was a change of timetable (to suit a new tutor rather than the daily shift pattern), there was a marked drop in attendance. Shift work is often mentioned as a reason why people have not taken up adult education prior to the learning schemes coming to the worksite.

*2.3 Cover*

When adequate cover is not provided by the company, students often find that due to pressure of work they are unable to attend classes.

Within a production setting, this can occur both when the work is organised within traditional lines, when it is the supervisor or line leader who makes the decision about whether students can attend a class if the line is very busy or short-staffed - or when the work is organised in teams, when students have to make their own decision on whether to 'desert' the team to attend the class, based on the pressure of work on the team at that time, and the relationships between the team members. Students who work on their own have a different set of decisions to make: based around prioritising of work, pressure of deadlines, and responsibilities to others.

Outside the production setting, pressure of work can still mean that students can be excluded from classes. Competitive tendering for Council contracts, and cuts in higher education spending, has meant that cleaning within County Councils and Universities, for example, has to be done by less people, within less time, and ostensibly to a higher standard than previously: leaving workers little opportunity to leave their posts during work time, if they are to keep up the quality of their work, even if their managers make the time available. A system of adequate cover can go some way to solving this problem. However, as Jane Mace points out, this has to be well thought out:

*"Actually, a large number of manual workers of my acquaintance have a higher standard of work that they do every day than that expected of them. They care about their work. Permission from managers and bosses to let them go to a course is not always the generous gift that those employers may think it is: for what it puts at risk is their own high standards of work. It may be OK for those paperworkers*

*to leave their desks for half a day a week to go on a course; but unless there is someone to replace the cleaner or care assistant or maintenance worker when they go on a course, and someone who works to their standard, something far more precious than their employer's training programme is at stake; their own job satisfaction."*

(Mace, 1992)

*2.4 Provision for carers*

The women workers at BICC were unable to attend classes in their own time, having commitments outside of work to children and families. The managers involved in the decision-making around this issue (both from the college and the company) felt that this showed a lack of commitment from the women, but the tutor of the group felt that the women were committed to the learning opportunity, and that this was shown by the amount of homework they took away and completed.

Other studies (for example, see Payne et al, forthcoming) also quote examples of women finding problems with attending classes partly in their 'own time'. The general conclusion from this being that working women don't have their 'own time': time they spend at work is their employer's time, earning money for their families, and time away from work 'belongs to' their children and partners. Erica Wimbush (1988) quotes Liz Heron (1986) as saying that *"women do not wholly belong to themselves"*. Eileen Green et al, in a study of Sheffield women's leisure experiences somewhat ruefully called "Women's Leisure, What Leisure" (Green et al 1990), talks about the impact women's paid work has on their opportunities for leisure:

*"The 'double staff' of full-time employment and domestic work leaves many women with pitifully little time and energy for leisure in its normally accepted sense - of participation in recreational activities."*

(ibid, p 96)

It was also noted by the Workbase consultant in her Training Needs report to BICC management, that in addition to some of the workers, mostly women, being responsible for pre-school and school-age children, some workers were responsible for elderly relatives.

Holding courses entirely during working hours means that those workers responsible for others outside of work can benefit from the opportunity without having to pay for alternative arrangements. Another option, for companies, might be to pay childcare and other costs for those workers affected, if the courses are held partly in workers' own time.

**3. Consultation, Co-ordination and Commitment**

*3.1 Consultation*

At Richards & Appleby, fourteen initial presentations about the scheme were made in one day. The first couple of sessions went quite quickly, with very few questions or comments. However, after the break, the news had got round the factory and the next few sessions were 'buzzing', with

lots of questions and doubts expressed - including people asking whether the College project worker had a financial interest in the firm, or if she was getting free products from the firm. At one session the managing director was present for part of the procedure, which noticeably affected - but did not dry up - the amount of questions asked by the workers in that group.

At one presentation by the college staff in the canteen at BICC, some time after the initial Training Needs Analysis had taken place, there were reports of 'heckling' from members of the workforce. However, despite this, more workers went to discuss the classes in a group setting than on a previous occasion, when the tutors had sat in a private room and not one person went to see them.

The more effective rate of participation after the workers had had an opportunity to talk among themselves about the initiative shows the value of allowing time for group discussions among colleagues as part of any process of introducing change into an organisation.

And as Stephanie Pordage, the Workbase consultant, said about the process of gaining the support of the unions or employee representatives, setting up a steering group, finding out the company needs from managers, holding group meetings with workers, and carrying out a training needs analysis consisting of individual interviews with workers:

> *"Although it seems lengthy, it actually encourages and fosters commitment to the training that will be set up afterwards and people can actually feel that their needs are being met."*
>
> (Workbase consultant, Seminar, November 1992)

The fact of having a Steering Group made up of representatives of the different 'stakeholders' (management, middle management, college, unions and students) meeting regularly means that the scheme has more chance of being seen as responding to the needs and requirements of all the parties, rather than to those of just one or two.

In the Ford 'EDAP' programme, an unexpected and welcome benefit of the scheme was that the EDAP education committee and the classes were the first time that management and unions had ever sat down together in a non-confrontational situation (Metcalf, 1992).

### *3.2 Coordination*

Many of the problems which can arise in workplace basic skills schemes can be put down to lack of communication within the company, or between the company and the training provider. In addition, the case studies show that administration of the scheme (room bookings, timetabling, publicity, acquisitions, finance, etc) take up a lot of time.

To show the company's commitment to the scheme, the coordination function needs to be managed at a senior level within the company: and to provide good communication the training provider should also nominate a named person to liaise regularly with the contact in the company about the scheme. In this way, problems (on either side) can be raised and discussed as soon as they arise: though it should be ensured that this 'management level communication' should not be at the expense of consultation with other members of the Steering Committee.

*3.3 Commitment*

It can be seen from the Case Studies that schemes introduced from outside, into a company not wholly committed to the continuation of the scheme and not prepared to or able to commit funds and time to it, are less likely to take on a life of their own than schemes where the whole organization is involved from the start in its negotiation, and a commitment of funds is made at a high level within the organization.

It is important that workers' hopes are not unduly raised, by having a scheme such as this presented to them in mass meetings, and a training needs analysis conducted, only for the scheme to be shelved for some reason (such as lack of funds, change in organizational commitment to the project). If a worker has had little contact with education for many years, and is then asked in the course of a training needs analysis sponsored by the company to think about his or her educational aspirations, it leads to poor worker-company relations if the results of the training needs analysis are not followed up, and if that worker's reawakened training demands are not met or discussed.

If there is a commitment to training, this must be seen as being reflected throughout the whole organisation. One respondent in our company telephone survey told us that he had stopped encouraging his workforce to attend courses: he found that they returned to the job with lots of good ideas, but that they were prevented from implementing them by senior management, who, he felt, saw that kind of change as threatening their own power.

## 4. Breaking Down Barriers

*4.1 Publicity and enrolment*

Words, and titles, are very important in the area of 'Basic Skills'. There is a lot of stigma and emotion around the use of the word 'literacy'. 'Dyslexic' also seems to be a 'loaded' word. The Cases show that there is a great effort made by management and colleges to use non-loaded words, in an effort not to put people off the classes. The employer survey shows 17% of respondents suggesting that one difficulty around implementing workplace basic skills training is that of the stigma associated with the subject, the difficulty in convincing people that they might benefit from basic skills training.

Baxi's problem with the Observer newspaper and 'Dyslexic Duncan', in an article published very early in the life of the project, is a spectre which was raising its head at Richards & Appleby as well as at Baxi well into 1992.

Illustrating the issue of stigma around 'illiteracy', a student at BICC told us:

> *"Some people thought it was for people who couldn't read and write. They wouldn't want to be thought <u>like that</u> in front of their workmates. Then we found out there's more to it than that."*
>
> (our emphasis)

And a Channel Four television programme, 'Liberating Literacy', screened in December 1990 at the end of International Literacy Year, brought up some difficulties. This programme, which contrasted participative, facilitative, projects with more prescriptive learning settings, showed a group of adult learners visiting different kind of projects, and then introduced Paolo Freire talking about how he saw these learners and each of these projects.

One project filmed, a Workplace Learning project in East Lancashire, showed a class run by an Accrington College tutor, and some of the students at work: with a voice-over talking about 'Adult Literacy'. The tutor concerned reported to us that the students had felt very embarrassed by comments they had received in the local village after the programme had been screened. She felt that the programme had particularly mis-represented the students, because that particular class of students was at GCSE English level rather than being Basic English students. Presumably, the situation would have been similar, or perhaps worse, for any student who *did* have basic skills needs.

It seems to us that the whole issue of returning to learning is a very loaded issue, which awakens a lot of fear in people, fear which may have remained buried since their schooldays. However often we change the words, the feelings will still arise. Baxi's experience - the Open Learning Centre being called the Early Learning Centre, for example - is a symptom, not the disease in itself.

"*It takes great courage to go on a course*", as one of the contributors to the book "Not Just A Number" wrote in her evaluation of the writing weekend which led to that publication. You are in effect putting yourself publicly on the line, stating to others that you have training needs, there's something missing. It is much easier to stand on the outside and put people down for taking that step, and the stories told by the students we spoke to are full of tales of taking 'stick' from colleagues.

Jean Hewitt, a process worker from the Brooke Bond Foods education for redundancy initiative in East Lancashire, wrote

> *"While many took advantage of the courses others held the attitude that they were a waste of time or they lacked the confidence to try them."*
> (from 'Not Just A Number)

and it is perhaps the very people who lack the confidence to take that first step who are going to be the loudest hecklers on the sidelines, to cover their own feelings. Some workmates will suspect students of going on the courses just in order to get away from work for an hour or two. In fact some students may start off the courses thinking that that is the case, but they usually realize that the sessions are not an 'easy option': one student at Richards & Appleby told us:

> *"I went on the courses for a skive, to be honest - but now I enjoy English, and the Personal Effectiveness classes. People on the course want to better themselves in general, or for a better job."*

So if the company wants to encourage the 'traditional non-participant adult' back to education, offering the simple 'carrot' of a couple of hours away from factory work may be a very effective

way of getting at least some people through the door, so that they can find out what is really involved in education.

Negative pressures come from heckling colleagues and doubting families maybe, but they also live inside students' own heads. We know that 20% of Richards & Appleby respondents replied "*lack of confidence*" to the question "has anything stopped you applying for courses or promotion?", and that the 7% of workers found by the BICC Training Needs Analysis to have very basic skills needs did not come forwards during the life of the initiative.

We heard over and over again students talking about their schooldays in terms such as that of the Richards & Appleby student who said:

> *"At school, a few of them were taught and the rest were left... At home, the boys were pushed more than the girls."*

We talked to one worker, not taking classes at his company, who remembers being very happy at school because they allowed him and a mate to take the milk round at school in the mornings rather than to have to sit in the classroom. He realises that he is paying for it now with his lack of confidence in setting out letters. And there is the story, mentioned in the Case Studies, of another person who hadn't come forward to go on the first round of courses - who couldn't write and was literally losing sleep, living in fear because he had been told he had to go on a course the following month, and he was terrified that his 'deficiency' would be discovered.

A 1990 study of access to education for 'non-participant adults', "Education's for Other People", by Veronica McGivney, reminds us that

> *"adult participation in education is the continuation of a process which starts at school. School creates (or reinforces) sharp divisions in society, by conditioning children to accept different expectations and status patterns according to their academic 'success' or 'failure'."*
>
> (McGivney, 1990)

She cites Hopper & Osborn (1975) who state that

> *"Through the use of imposed standards and selection, the education system traditionally rejects or excludes large numbers of the population, many of whom subsequently consider themselves as educational failures."*
>
> (Hopper & Osborn, op. cit.)

It is important that an enrolment system is set up in a way which does not play its own part in rejecting or excluding 'educational failures'. Students may not wish to go to their supervisors, or the personnel department, to enrol on a 'basic skills' class: a system should be in place where students can approach tutors directly if they wish, or be able to discuss their requests with student representatives or union representatives from the steering committee if they prefer.

There must be no question of the courses being seen as being a punitive measure, or that people be 'recommended' for them by their supervisors as a kind of remedial action. To maintain their

benefit attendance needs to be voluntary: so that all the students who are there want to be there, and are willing, active and equal participants in the learning experience.

*4.2 Warmth*

A warm, welcoming, caring and loving approach by the tutors and the rest of the group is essential to overcome these fears. An example of this is given by one of the students who contributed to "Not Just A Number" and the related video, Maria Smith, a cook at an alternative to custody centre with Sheffield City Council, who said

> *"Without it* [Sheffield's education scheme] *a lot of people wouldn't go back into education. ... I've been out of education for 27 years, and you need something like that ... A lot of people felt a fear at school, didn't they. You go at your own pace on these courses, and you're made to feel quite important, that you're good as the next person, and I think what it gives you is education's for everybody, not just for the chosen few."*

*4.3 Continuity*

A time commitment - an assurance that the classes will continue - will help to encourage those people who, like the two men mentioned above, see themselves as non-participants in education and training, and would be unable to respond to the first tranche of publicity. This group is far more likely to stand back and watch what befalls the first - and maybe second, and even third - group of 'guinea-pigs' before putting themselves on the line.

As one student at one of the Case Study sites said:

> *"A lot were dubious. I was, but I saw a couple of them and saw the work they were doing and it seemed interesting. People need to know what's going on before they go to the classes. ..."*

This continuity has other benefits too. For any long term change to be facilitated within a company, a long-term commitment to training must be made. It was particularly felt by the ALBSU project worker at Richards & Appleby that the level of confidence and the state of shop-floor relations had improved greatly after the classes, but that for any long-lasting culture change, the commitment to the training from the company would have to continue, otherwise there was a danger of a return to the status quo.

**5. Confidentiality**

The fact that the Training Needs Analysis in the Workbase model is carried out by an outside organization leads to a sense of confidence by the students in the process of finding out the training needs of the organisation. They can assure themselves that any basic skills 'deficiency' which comes to light in the interviews will be synthesized into a percentage, and that their individual 'problem', which they may have had a great fear of exposing, will not be exposed to

management, as would be the danger if the training needs analysis was to be carried out by the Personnel department.

We have mentioned above the student losing sleep because he had to attend a training course and was sick with fear that his company would discover his 'secret', of not being able to read and write. This worker is not likely to attend classes being run by the in-house training department: having an outside organization running the classes, with an overt policy of confidentiality on students' levels and progress, is the only way that this type of student is likely even to put his or her head round the door.

We heard about a workplace learning development project in Kentucky which sets great store by its confidentiality. This project has to report back to the employers who are paying the fees for the classes, but has got round the problem of maintaining students' confidentiality by aggregating students' scores on a standard test at the beginning and end of each 12-week block of its rolling programmes, and reporting the total increase in scores rather than students' individual marks or individual starting or finishing points. (Verbal communication, 1993, Jeannie Hetherly, Jefferson County, Kentucky)

### 6. The Learning Environment

The 'goldfish bowl' syndrome noted by workers at Baxi when they were initially put into a room in the centre of the shop floor, surrounded by glass, (before the construction of the Open Learning centre) caused many problems and may have put some students off going to the courses.

Occasionally tutors from the Case Study sites were asked to change rooms at short notice: sometimes the room offered was 'better' than the regular one (for example one session took place in the Boardroom) but there is still a feeling that if your session is moved in favour of any other meeting, yours is the 'second class' session and is not viewed as being of importance.

In contrast to this, in order to invest the sessions with dignity and make the students feel they are being treated with respect, the learning should take place in a room which is made available regularly for the purpose.

In the case of a multi-site company such as Baxi, some students have further to travel to the classes than others, and throughout our investigations students from the peripheral sites have been saying that they would appreciate sessions held actually at their worksite, to avoid the extra travelling time. These students are working within teams, and thus are going to be away from their team for a longer period while they are travelling to and from the Open Learning centre. This, of course, would happen in the same way in the case of a small business if it joined with other small businesses to run a Learning Centre on, say, a central point in an industrial estate. The problem can only be avoided if adequate cover is provided whilst the student is at the course, to cover travel time as well as learning time.

## 7. The Curriculum

We feel that the curriculum should above all be negotiated with the student group, and should reflect the needs and interests of that group.

It could be useful for tutors to spend some time on the shop floor and in quality circles and other meetings which involve potential students - to gain some idea of the literacy and numeracy content of the jobs and peripheral activities, but also, and no less important, because the workforce would then have easier access to the tutors than if they were only to be found behind the classroom doors.

Teaching materials should reflect the whole range of 'literacy and numeracy activities' undertaken by the group, both at work and elsewhere. As Sue Nieduszynska said at an 'Adult Learning at Work' seminar in November 1992, held at Baxi Heating:

> *"The work we're doing may be related to work: I believe that the sheet metal shop are training people in setting, which requires some understanding of drawings, some understanding of metric, so that we've got a couple of chaps from there coming in to Open Learning to brush up on those skills. We also have people who need to write accident reports, or whatever. It doesn't have to be work related though. What we're teaching is transferable core skills so if somebody is doing a project on Pike Fishing, then the skills like spelling and punctuation and presentation of the material is directly transferable to the job."*

The student who has chosen to do a project on Pike Fishing will be motivated to research the topic because it is something he or she is interested in: but the basic skills used (spelling, punctuation, presentation, and also researching, reading, scanning, finding out information) will be transferable to the work situation and to other 'home life' situations.

Jane Mace (Mace, 1992) writes about the curriculum choices in a slightly different way: as being important to both '*please the funders and attract the students*":

> *"Always trying to insert something of the naughty and joyful bits of literacy work into the courses argued for as providing a means for 'better communication in the workplace'."* (ibid).

One example of a management-influenced curriculum which did not seem particularly successful is quoted in a paper by Glynda Hull of Berkeley University (Hull, 1991). In this paper, Hull examines the "*now commonplace assertion, presented as a statement of fact, that because they apparently lack literacy skills American workers can be held accountable for our country's lagging economy...*", and draws on recent literature, thinking and practice to challenge this view. Hull quotes an unpublished doctoral dissertation with the evocative title "Eyes on a different prize" (Gowen, 1990).

Gowen talks about a group of African-American hospital workers taking literacy classes at work:

> *"Trying to tie literacy instruction to job content, the instructors developed a series of lessons based on the memos one supervisor regularly sent his housekeeping staff. These memos were called 'weekly tips' ... and covered such topics as 'dust mopping, daily vacuuming, damp mopping of corridors ...'."*

Gowen says that the students disliked this method of instruction, saying, for example

> *"I didn't like rewriting things concerning mopping, cleaning and dish washing. I felt I already knowed that."*

and resisting in ways like losing the 'weekly tips', stopping coming to class; with a sense of relief once the Weekly Tips assignments ended.

> *"So we off that Weekly Tips junk? I don't want to know nothing about no mopping and no dusting."*

Hull (op. cit.) does not quote this example in order to argue against work-related literacy projects, but to

> *"speak in favor of a serious rethinking of the nature of the instruction we imagine for workers."*

She goes on to emphasise the importance of listening to the learners' requirements:

> *"As we rush headlong to design curricula and programs and to measure reading rates and writing quality, we pay precious little attention to how people experience curricula and programs and for what purposes they choose and need to engage in reading and writing. We steer our ships instead by what corporate and government leaders think they want in a workforce and by our own enculturated notions of what teaching is about, even when our students are adults rather than children."*
>
> (Hull, op. cit.)

stressing again the importance of listening to the learner and what he or she wants to learn.

Another potential problem, if management is providing work-related materials to be used by the tutor, is that the tutor and the college can be drawn into areas where they could become involved in potential conflict situations with the trades unions.

One example where this could be a problem was raised in our discussions with a NATFHE shop steward. If the scheme is taking place in a company where the management want to raise issues with the workforce through team briefings, instead of through the trades unions, if an issue to be brought up involves presenting figures, diagrams, tables or statistics to the workforce, it may seem an obvious step to give the diagrams or tables to the ABE tutor to go through with (or, in other words "explain to") the students at a session prior to the team briefing where the particular issue is to be discussed. The potential problem arises at this stage. When the information is

handed out at the team briefing, those students who have examined the data in the ABE class will be quite likely to say "Oh yes, we've done this in the class, we understand that, it's fine". If there is an area of potential conflict within the issue, the tutors will then be seen to have aligned themselves directly with management.

If, on the other hand, the students bring the item to the class and say that they have specific questions to ask about, say, the way that the figures are laid out, the meaning of the words, etc, the tutor can then work through the issue *with* the students, rather than *for* them. The task of the tutor in the latter case is much more that of co-researcher, a preferable position to that of teacher/propagandist.

Another issue was raised by the North West TUC Education Officer in our discussions with her: she felt that if Health and Safety issues, for example, were discussed in the classes, this would again seem like a case of an issue which should be negotiated between management and trades unions being presented as a 'fait accompli' by the tutors, and may put the tutor, probably a trade union member as well, between the unions and the management.

**8. Progression**

Many emotions and feelings are sparked off by returning to education. Many adult returners we met during the research talked to us about the excitement that education has brought into their lives:

> *"I thought I would just be a cleaner until retirement. But now going on courses I feel I can better myself. I can put my view of things over even if other people do not agree. Also I very rarely say "I can not do that" not without trying anyway. I do not put myself down as much, because I now do things that I would not have dreamed of doing this time last year. The courses I have been on in the last year have given me confidence in myself to do more".*
>
> Jennifer Cussens, Take Ten student, in 'Not Just A Number'.

At both Baxi Heating and Richards & Appleby, students are encouraged to go on to further education at the local colleges (in their own time, but in some cases sponsored by the company). At Baxi Heating, and at other large employers (Lancaster University being one) Further and Adult Education College staff will run Open Days at the workplace to provide information to workers, who wouldn't otherwise be able to get to (daytime) information sessions, about forthcoming courses and events at the colleges, and take enrolments. When an individual's 'eyes are opened' with a return to education, it is very important that they are provided with the opportunity and encouragement to go on elsewhere and make use of the education which they have started, if they wish.

Two students from Sheffield City Council 'Take Ten' scheme told us how their hopes had been raised by the first course that they had attended at 'Take Ten'. The tutors had talked to them about further courses they could take up, but they were blocked by their employers (who were concerned about meeting increased targets) from carrying on along that path: even though they had managed to make quite complicated arrangements to do their work at different days and times so they could attend the courses.

This was in contrast to some of the other students we spoke to from Take Ten, who had had great encouragement from their respective employers. One student had been granted day release by her employer to do a course which would eventually lead on to a degree, over seven years; another, (Maria Smith, quoted above in Section 5), a cook in an alternative to custody centre, was beginning to undertake training to become a probation officer; a third, Jennifer Cussens, also quoted above, who had been a cleaner in a home for children with learning difficulties when we first met her, had done a number of different training courses and less than a year on was very pleased to have managed to get a temporary job as an assistant social worker.

Even if there are no opportunities for promotion within the company, the chance to take up the opportunity for further study is often taken up, if only to help children or grandchildren with their studies, or to 'prove something to yourself'. The fact of having outside tutors running courses within workplaces, and coming in and out of the site regularly, means that communications are continually going backwards and forwards to the college - as long as that tutor is seen by the college for what s/he is; not just an hourly-paid, say, Maths tutor, but a real public relations person for the college who can form many more links and fulfil a valuable outreach and guidance role.

**9. Quality of the Learning Programme**

ALBSU, the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit, has spent some time developing a series of Quality Standards for Basic Skills programmes wherever they are run, and these are listed below:

ALBSU's Quality Standards are that every student or trainee should be entitled to:

1. A confidential, personal interview before beginning tuition.
2. A learning opportunity within easy reach of home.
3. At least four hours direct tuition a week.
4. An appropriate teacher/student ratio in a learning group.
5. Respect for gender and cultural identity.
6. A negotiated learning plan.
7. Regular assessment of progress.
8. Access to progression including advice and guidance.
9. Access to accreditation.
10. Teaching by staff trained to nationally recognised standards.
11. Access to suitable learning material.
12. Teaching which takes account of the context for learning.

Source: ALBSU (b), 1992

There is very little difference between the 'community' served by basic skills classes in the workplace or out of it; these standards should apply as a matter of course to basic skills classes set up anywhere. As Sondra Gayle Stein says in her paper on the Massachusets model for effective practice in workplace literacy:

> *"What gave our programs focus and direction was their responsiveness to the educational needs of the community in which they functioned. In terms of how they set goals and met them, how they recruited students and retained them, how they assessed learners and measured progress, our programs were community-based programs: in this case, however, the workplace was the community, providing a community of interest, of need, of association and of aspiration as a starting point for curriculum and instruction."*
>
> (Stein, 1992, our emphasis)

**10. Evaluation**

In order to enable the most effective learning to take place, an ongoing evaluation programme should run alongside the courses, and there should be a built in mechanism for listening to and responding to its findings.

At the November 1992 'Adult Learning At Work' seminar held at Baxi Heating, with participants from industry and commerce, the first question to the Baxi team in the plenary session related to the financial outlay; whether there was a cost benefit analysis done, and if there had been any objections to its implementation from a financial point of view.

This kind of question is always one which is going to be asked by the board of a company when looking at a workplace basic skills scheme. As Jane Mace says (Mace, op. cit.)

> *"What we have to do ... is persuade them that they can argue for this 'workplace training' to their auditors. ... Motives such as good industrial relations, a 'feel good' factor, humanitarian principles, or even equal opportunities policies have to be tempered with those of profit."*

Sondra Gayle Stein (Stein, op. cit.) suggests that in setting up an evaluation programme, we need to be sure that we are *"asking the right questions to find out whether and how workplace education programs are really making a difference for individual workers and for workplaces".*

Stein outlines the processes which the 'Commonwealth Literacy Campaign of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts', of which she is Director, have gone through in order for the different workplace literacy programmes with which she has been involved have been able to document what they were doing, reflect on their practice, and learn from each others' successes and failures.

In this programme, an independent evaluation team went in to each programme about six months after they had been set up, and conducted site visits identify areas of strength and areas where assistance was needed. These site visits:

*"brought together all the stakeholders in a local partnership and asked them to reflect - individually and as a group - on the history, goals, accomplishments and problems of that partnership. For most, it was the first time they stopped to reflect on what was happening, to articulate why they thought it was happening, and to compare notes with others about what they saw as working or not working and why."*

(Stein, op. cit.).

Stein goes on to talk about how the different stakeholders' different agendas were often kept hidden:

"*these conversations often brought into the open for the first time the different agendas of the different players in the partnership. ...* [for example] *the site visit exploded a brewing conflict between management's expectation of narrowly job-specific ESL* [English as a second language] *curricula and the union's concern that workers get the broader English language skills they needed to communicate both on and off the job."*

(Stein, op. cit.).

Stein talks about the difference between a 'literacy audit' kind of evaluation, whereby the students' levels of literacy or numeracy are tested before and after the courses and the difference measured - which she likens to Taylorist time-and-motion principles - and an 'impact evaluation', where her evaluation teams got together with the schemes they were evaluating to work out a system for documenting how, why and where the education schemes were impacting on the workplace.

The way that this was carried out was that groups of managers, supervisors, union representatives, and workers, from both manufacturing and services were asked a series of four open-ended questions, with more specific follow-up questions. The main questions were:

*"Do you want the workplace education program at your worksite to change things at work?"*

*"If yes, what things do you want to change?"*

*"If no, why don't you want things to change?"*

*"How do you know if things have changed?"*

These basic questions have helped to define a methodology which is used in Massachusetts to help individual companies develop their own indicators by which to measure the performance of their scheme: and which, as a spin-off, allows them to compare their performance against others' performances, and gain from that process.

Evaluation in a UK setting, then, should ensure that representation is given to the views of all the stakeholders in the system, and not just those of the piper-payer.

# Chapter Thirteen

## Recommendations

The core communications skills of reading, writing, mathematics, and computer skills, are now becoming increasingly important for manual workers. They are important in terms of getting a job, carrying out the job, understanding the procedures of the job, and communicating with colleagues at work. They are also fundamental in gaining a greater understanding of the workings of the organization, in participating in decision-making processes and in getting access to promotion and to wider education and training opportunities. To be most successful Workplace Basic Skills programmes need to be introduced as part of a wider training policy.

### 1. Information

***Action: policy makers, TECs and LECS, training providers, trades unions, employer organizations, research institutions.***

There should be a constant flow of information to public and private sector organizations about the benefits of core communications skills training. Funds should be made available on a national basis to facilitate this process.

### 2. Universal Access

***Action: policy makers, TECs and LECs, training providers, employers.***

*2.1 All companies*

It should be recognised by employers that all companies - small and large, with or without identified training departments, whether or not they are aiming for the new quality standards - need to provide their manual workers with access to basic communications skills training.

*2.2 All groups of workers*

In providing access to this training, distinction should not be made between full-time or part-time workers, between day shift and 'twilight' or night shift workers, between 'core' or 'periphery' workers, between permanent or temporary staff, or between male or female workers. Classes may have to be run outside 'normal' college hours to fit in with the schedules of some groups of workers.

*2.3 Cover*

Ideally the training should take place during working hours. Any other arrangement should be negotiated between the parties involved. Cover should be provided for students while they are away from work, or provision made so they do not have to make up their work in their own time after classes. Where learning takes place away from the worksite, travelling time should be allowed for in release arrangements.

*2.4 Provision for carers*

Some schemes have operated successfully on a shared time basis, where the classes take place partly in work time, partly in workers' own time. Where this approach is taken, the issue of workers who are responsible for others, as parents and carers, should be considered, and provision should be made (for example, payment for childcare) so that these groups of workers can take part in the scheme, and their participation should be carefully monitored.

**3. Consultation, Co-ordination and Commitment**

***Action: employers, training providers, trades unions***

*3.1 Consultation*

When a scheme is being introduced into a company, the widest possible consultation should take place, between all the stakeholders: management, unions, middle management, supervisors, shop floor workers, and training providers, in order for the whole company to feel it 'owns' the scheme. This consultation should continue throughout the life of the scheme, through regular meetings of a steering committee made up of representatives of these stakeholders. Funds need to be made available for this process.

*3.2 Coordination*

Commitment to the scheme should be demonstrated by companies' designating somebody at a senior level in the company to be responsible for the scheme and liaise with tutors and others involved: sufficient *time* and resources need to be set aside by that person to administer and coordinate the scheme effectively. A named person should also be nominated by the training provider to liaise with the company.

*3.3 Commitment*

Students' expectations should not be raised unnecessarily. If a training scheme is announced, sufficient funds should be committed for it to be set up and for its continued existence.

In addition, it is important that the situation be avoided where the board backs a scheme, a student wants to attend a class, a tutor is waiting, but a supervisor has no leeway on production targets and cannot allow the student to be released to attend the course. The 'consultation' and 'coordination' processes outlined above should facilitate clear lines of communication between the parties and help to avoid these situations.

**4. "Breaking Down Barriers"**

***Action: employers, training providers***

Some students' last experiences of learning may have been in the distant past, or quite negative. In order to encourage people who haven't normally participated in educational provision to return to learning at the workplace, these programmes must not be seen as punitive or remedial, and attendance must be voluntary and self-selecting.

*4.1 Publicity and enrolment*

The way in which the courses are publicised, and in which students enrol, should be handled sensitively, in a way which respects students' confidentiality, and does not single out potential participants as being 'deficient'.

*4.2 Warmth*

Students should feel warm, welcomed, and comfortable in the room where the classes take place: there should be no hint of a 'schoolroom' atmosphere.

*4.3 Continuity*

The classes should be the kept going for long enough for a 'second wave' (and even a third and fourth wave) of applicants to come forward. Some workers, while potentially benefitting from the scheme, would not feel ready to take up the opportunity of this kind of training straight away. These workers would need to hear feedback about the courses from other students, and to gauge the reaction they are likely to get from workmates, before taking the plunge.

**5. Confidentiality**

***Action: Employers, Training Providers***

To ensure confidentiality and foster confidence, the training should preferably be provided by tutors from outside the students' employing organization, or failing that, from outside their immediate department.

The content of students' individual programmes should not be passed to the employer by tutors. Students should retain the right to make choices about the information their employers have about their basic skills levels and progress.

**6. The Learning Environment**

***Action: employers, training providers***

Learning should take place wherever possible on the worksite, in a room made regularly available for the purpose, separated from the working area so as to avoid interruptions and disturbances.

As mentioned above, learning providers should aim to foster a warm and welcoming environment where students are treated with respect, and can try out new ideas with confidence.

**7. The Curriculum**

***Action: training providers, (with employers and unions)***

Whilst the curriculum should take account of workplace needs, it should be negotiated with the student group to accommodate wider educational needs and interests.

Information about accreditation schemes should be available, and those students who want it should have the possibility of having their work accredited. Students should, however, have the opportunity of attending the classes even if they do not wish to take part in accreditation schemes.

**8. Progression**

***Action: employers, training providers***

Opportunities for progression need to be put in place: links with other education providers, locally and further afield, are important so that students can continue the learning which they have started; whether that be in work time or in students' own time, and funded by the employer or by the students themselves.

**9. Quality of the Learning Programme**

***Action: Training Providers***

As far as possible, the elements listed in the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit (ALBSU) "Quality Standards for Basic Skills", (ALBSU, 1992), should be present in the learning programmes. These elements are listed on page 169.

**10. Evaluation**

***Action: Policy Makers, Employers, Training Providers, Trade Unions***

A long term evaluation programme should be built into the programme, taking into account a variety of performance indicators determined by the different 'stakeholders': management, trades unions, supervisors and students. The evaluation should feed back continually to the group running the ongoing provision. Adequate funds should be made available for this evaluation process to take place.

# Endnote

The main 'message' coming out of this research is that workplace basic skills training can awaken people's latent talents in all kinds of areas, as well as having a beneficial effect for the company which pays for the training. Either of these benefits can be seen as almost incidental to the other and this is an issue which needs further exploration.

During the two and a half years over which we have been involved with this research (January 1991 to June 1993) we have learned a great deal about workplace adult basic education. We have begun to realise that it does not exist in a vacuum: it is an inter-disciplinary topic, relating education to concerns in management and industrial relations, with a wide scope for international comparative study. We have learned to look beyond the basic skills programme itself, to the broader training strategy and culture of a given workplace, if we are to understand the impact of basic skills training within it. The changing organization of workplaces and colleges and other providers of courses also shapes our understanding.

As with much research, on completing this study we feel we are only just beginning to learn about some aspects of the topic. We are currently meeting with other researchers in different aspects of workplace learning - relating to management training, training using information technology, incidental learning, and employee development schemes - and finding that we all have a message for each other. These meetings are leading to the preparation of a collection of papers which will 'speak to each other' (Machell & Frank, in preparation): we have found that adult literacy has an important message for other workplace training programmes, which often make unrealistic assumptions of their participants' grasp of basic skills, or of their confidence in the use of new technology. Our discussions have renewed our confidence in the importance of our work.

We have a 'constituency' of students (the 'Not Just A Number' book and video group) who are committed to promoting workplace learning, and who are keen to continue meetings and activities.

We have a network of correspondents throughout Europe, North America and Australia, with whom we would like to produce some writing: an international perspective on workplace learning.

The University where we are based, at Lancaster, has just begun to look at its own training needs in terms of basic skills for its cleaners, caterers and porters: the idea for this came from the university's Staff Development department via our research. We have been involved in the decision-making on this from the beginning, and find this a particularly rewarding outcome of the project.

Our booklet 'Not Just A Number' has sold widely, to ABE departments and TECs in particular, as well as to individuals and others such as an Industrial Chaplain, and several higher degree students in different fields. We hope that our video will have equally wide circulation.

We have already been invited to speak at several conferences: the Leeds Adult Learners at Work international conference on 'developing a learning workforce' (July 1993) and the Policy Studies Institute "Skills Focus" conference on 'motivation' (December 1993).

We hope to continue to make our mark in this field and to be able to influence developments within it. The distance we are able to keep as researchers rather than practitioners has been useful, as we have so far been able to maintain an impartial overview rather than becoming involved in day-to-day detail of running projects - therefore maintaining our usefulness as a resource for others.

Our Consultative Group has become a 'talking-shop' on workplace training in Lancashire, where we have found out, among other things, that LAWTEC was unsuccessful in its bid to ALBSU for a Basic Skills at Work Pilot Project, despite positive messages from the Field Officer: it seems that there were not sufficient funds left in this year's budget.

Lancashire Enterprises approached us in Summer 1992, asking us to set up a project helping to develop workplace basic skills training throughout the county. We wrote a proposal which Lancashire Enterprises welcomed: but their own training budget was cut by Lancashire County Council, who had to find £60 million of cuts in their current financial year, so the proposal could no longer be funded.

We submitted the same proposal to Lancaster University's CVET (Continuing Vocational Education and Training) committee, and were awarded some funds to run awareness raising seminars and tutor training sessions. However, there are no funds available within Lancashire to help employers to start up such schemes, once they have had their awareness of them raised.

Energy, optimism, enthusiastic partners and knowledge of the value of basic skills work is not enough without the necessary funding to underpin the work that is waiting to be done. It is on this rather more realistic note that we end our report.

# Bibliography

ABC Canada. *Literacy at Work.* Number 4, January 1993.

Abrahamson, K. *Learning Rights 2000: Reflections on Swedish Policies on adult learning competence and citizenship.* Stockholm, Swedish Institute for Future Studies, and National Agency of Education, 1991.

Ainley, P. & Corney, M. *Training for the future: the rise and fall of the MSC.* Cassell, London, 1990.

Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit (a). *Newsletter*, Winter, 1990.

Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit. (b) *Setting Up Workplace Basic Skills Training: Guidelines for Practitioners.* London, 1990.

Adult Literacy & Basic Skills Unit (a). *Basic Skills at Work: vocationally related basic skills provision in the LAWTEC area.* ALBSU, 1992.

Adult Literacy & Basic Skills Unit (b). *Quality Standards for Basic Skills.* London, 1992.

Adult Literacy & Basic Skills Unit (a). *The Cost to Industry: Basic Skills and the UK Workforce.* ALBSU, London, 1993.

Adult Literacy & Basic Skills Unit (b). Surveying Basic Skills, *Newsletter*, ALBSU, London, Summer 1993.

Adult Literacy & Basic Skills Unit (c). *Making it Happen: improving the basic skills of the workforce.* Video and accompanying 'Good Practice document'. ALBSU, 1993.

Atlantic Provinces Economic Council (APEC). *Impact of Undereducation on the Less Developed Regions of Advanced Economies.* St Johns, Newfoundland, 1990.

Atkinson, J. & Meager, N. (Institute of Manpower Studies) *Changing working patterns: how companies achieve flexibility to meet new needs.* National Economic Development Office, London, 1986.

Atkinson, J. & Papworth, R. *Literacy & Less Skilled Jobs.* Institute of Manpower Studies Report No. 211. IMS, Brighton, 1991.

Ball, S.J. *Politics & Policy Making in Education: Explorations in policy sociology.* Routledge, London, 1990.

Business Council for Effective Literacy (BCEL). *Newsletter.* No. 34, January 1993.

Braverman, H. *Labor & Monopoly Capital: The degradation of work in the twentieth century.* Monthly Review Press, New York & London, 1974.

Clarke, K. *Women and Training: a review of recent research and policy.* Equal Opportunities Commission, Manchester, 1991.

Davies, P., Fuller, A., Machell, J & Saunders, M. *The training scene: a summary of current training issues and provision.* IRDPCE, Lancaster, 1991.

Duckham, B.F. *A History of the Scottish Coal Industry, 1700 - 1815.* Newton Abbott, 1970.

Evans, N. *Experiential learning: its assessment and accreditation.* Routledge, London, 1992.

Edwards, R. et al. *Adult Learners, Education & Training.* Routledge, London, 1992.

Florida Dept of Education. *An Employer's Guide to Education in the Workplace: Facts, Programs and Resources.* Division of Vocational, Adult & community Education, Tallahassee, Florida, 1990

Florida Dept of Education. *Workforce Education Programs In Florida.* Division of Vocational, Adult & Community Education, Tallahassee, Florida, 1990.

Fox, A. *Man Mismanagement.* Hutchinson, London, 1985.

Frank, Fiona. *Partnership in Progress: An Account of a Basic Skills Training Scheme at a Heating Engineering Company in the North West of England.* CSET Working Paper, Centre for the Study of Education and Training, Lancaster University, Lancaster, 1990. This edition 1993.

Frank, F. *Adult Learning At Work Project Interim Report.* Centre for the Study of Education and Training, Lancaster University, Lancaster, July 1991.

Frank, F. (ed). *Not Just A Number; writings about workplace learning.* CSET (Centre for the Study of Education and Training), Lancaster University, Lancaster 1992.

Fulton, O. (ed.) *Access and Institutional Change.* SRHE / Open University Press, 1989.

Gowen, S. *"Eyes on a different prize": a critical ethnography of a workplace literacy program.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Georgia State University, Atlanta, 1990.

Green, E., Hebron, S., & Woodward, D. *Women's Leisure, what leisure?* Macmillan Education Ltd, Basingstoke & London, 1990.

Hamilton, M. *Literacy, numeracy & adults: evidence from the National Child Development Study.* Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit, London, 1987.

Hamilton, M. The development of adult literacy policy in the UK: A cautionary tale. *Internationales Jahrbuch der Erwachsenenbildung (International Yearbook of Adult Education*). Band 19/20. Böhlau Verlag, Cologne, Weimar & Vienna, Austria, 1992.

Hamilton, M. & Davies, P. *Written Communication Barriers to Employment. Final Report to the Employment Service.* Lancaster University, May 1990.

Heron, L. *Changes of Heart: Reflections on Women's Independence.* Pandora Press, London, 1986.

Hoddinott, S. Education in the Workplace. *Soundbone*, the Journal of the Newfoundland and Labrador Association for Adult Education, Vol 8, No 1, April 1988.

Hopper, E., & Osborn, M. *Adult Students: education selection and social control.* Francis Pinter (Publishers) Ltd, London, 1975.

Houston, A. *Scottish Literacy and the Scottish Identity: Illiteracy and Society in Scotland and Northern England 1600-1800.* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985.

Hull, G. *Hearing Other Voices: a critical assessment of popular views on literacy and work.* National Center for Research in Vocational Education, Graduate School of Education, University of California, Berkeley, 1991.

Institute of Manpower Studies, on behalf of the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit and the East and West Lancashire Training and Enterprise Councils. *Basic Skills At Work: A Report on the Lancashire Labour Market.* IMS, Brighton, 1992.

Institute of Manpower Studies (a) (Atkinson, J. & Spilsbury, M.) on behalf of the Adult Literacy & Basic Skills Unit. *Basic Skills and Jobs: a report on the basic skills needed at work.* ALBSU, London, 1993.

Institute of Manpower Studies (b) (Atkinson, J. & Spilsbury, M.) on behalf of the Adult Literacy & Basic Skills Unit. *The Basic Skills Needed At Work: A Directory.* ALBSU, London, 1993.

Johnson, R. *Really Useful Knowledge; Radical Education and Working-class Culture, 1790-1848,* in Tight, M. 1983.

Johnston, C. *Workshop Support Initiative - Evaluation.* HMP Garth, Ulnes Walton, March 1991.

Johnston, W. *Inventory of Workplace Literacy Programs.* ABC Canada, Ottawa, 1991.

Jupp, T. C. & Hodlin, S. *Industrial English: an example of theory and practice in functional language teaching for elementary learners,* Heinemann Educational, 1975.

Kelly, K., Montigny, G., O'Neill, T. & Sharpe, A. Literacy in the workplace. *Statistics Canada, Perspectives,* Spring 1992.

Kelly, T. *The Historical Evolution of Adult Education in Great Britain.* In Tight, M. (ed) 1983.

Kern, H. & Schumann, M. Limits of the Division of Labour, *Economic & Industrial Democracy,* Vol 8, no 2, 1987, pp 151-170.

Killeen, J. & Bird, M. *Education & Work: A Study of Paid Educational Leave in England & Wales, 1976/77.* National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, Leicester, 1981.

Kirsch, I., Jungeblut, A. & Campbell, A.. *Beyond the School Doors: the literacy needs of job seekers served by the US Department of Labor.* Educational Testing Series, US Department of Labour Employment & Training Administration, Princeton, N.J., 1992.

Labour Research Department. "Training" *in Bargaining Report*, January 1990.

Labour Research Department. *Training: A Negotiator's Guide.* LRD Publications, London, 1988.

MSF (Manufacturing Science Finance). *Training: The Way Ahead.* MSF, London, 1987.

Mace, J. & Yarnit, M. (eds.) *Time Off to Learn: Paid Educational Leave and low-paid workers.* Methuen, London, 1987.

Mace, J. Love, Literacy & Labour. *RaPAL (Research & Practice in Adult Literacy), Bulletin No 17,* Spring 1992.

Machell, J. & Frank, F. (Eds). Collected papers on Learning At Work, *CSET Working Papers*, Lancaster University, In Preparation

Mansbridge, A. *An adventure in working class education.* Longmans & Co, London, 1920.

Marsick, V.J. (ed.) *Learning in the Workplace.* Croom Helm, Beckenham, Kent, 1987.

Marsick, V.J. & Watkins, K.E. *Informal and incidental learning in the workplace.* Routledge, London, 1990.

McGivney, Veronica. *Education's for Other People: Access to Education for Non-Participant Adults.* National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, Leicester, 1990. Reprinted 1991.

McIlroy, J. Paid Educational Leave: Have we missed the next train? *The Industrial Tutor,* Journal of the Society of Industrial Tutors, Vol 5 No 1, Spring 1990.

McIlroy, J. Trade Union Education for a Change. In Simon, B. (ed) *The Search For Enlightenment.* NIACE, 1992.

Merrifield, J., Norris, L., & White, L. *"I'm Not a Quitter."* Job Training & Basic Education for Women Textile Workers, Centre for Literacy Studies, University of Tennessee, 1991.

Metcalf, H.; Policy Studies Institute (a). *Releasing Potential: Company Initiatives to Develop People at Work.* Vol 1, The Main Report. Employment Department, Sheffield, 1992.

Metcalf, H.; Policy Studies Institute (b). *Releasing Potential: Company Initiatives to Develop People at Work.* Vol 2, The Case Studies. Employment Department, Sheffield, 1992.

Mikulecky, L. *Job Literacy: the relationship between school preparation and workplace actuality.* Reading Research Quarterly, 17, pp400-419, 1982.

Millar, J.P.M. *The Labour College Movement.* NCLC Publishing Society Limited, London, 1979.

Miliband, D. *Learning by Right: an entitlement to paid education and training.* Education Training Paper No 2, Institute for Public Policy Research, 1990.

Molyneux, F., Low, G., Fowler, G. (eds.) *Learning for Life: Politics & Progress in Recurrent Education.* Croom Helm, 1988.

Munelly, C. Learning Participation: The Worker's Viewpoint. In Marsick, V. J. (ed) 1987.

NATFHE (National Association of Teachers in Further Education) Trade Union Studies Section. *Paid Educational Leave.* Manchester NATFHE TUSS, 1991.

National Training Task Force. *The Case for Targets: Skills for Britain's Future,* N.T.T.F., London, 1992.

O'Connor, P. *Pitfalls and Possibilities: Women and Workplace Basic Education.* Workplace Basic Education Resource Project, New South Wales Adult Literacy Council, 1991.

Omega Group Inc. *Literacy in the Workplace: the executive perspective.* Omega Group Inc., Haversford, PA, 1989.

O'Neill, T & Sharpe, A. *Functional Illiteracy: Economic Costs and Labour Market Implications.* Canadian journal article: source unknown.

Payne, J., Frank, F, Hamilton, M., & Hoddinott, S. *Workplace Learning: Who Benefits?* (in preparation).

Payne, J. et al. *Leeds Adult Learners at Work Project. The Final Report.* University of Leeds Department of Adult Continuing Education, Leeds, forthcoming.

Payne, J. et al. *Large Employers Survey Report.* University of Leeds Department of Adult Continuing Education, Leeds, 1992.

Payne, Joan. *Women, Training and the Skills Shortage: The case for public investment.* Policy Studies Institute, London, 1991.

Pedler, M., Burgoyne, J.G. & Boydell, T. *The Learning Company.* McGraw-Hill, London, 1991.

Prison Officers' Association. *Summary of the report of the Woolf Inquiry*, 1991.

Rainbird, H. *Training Matters: Union Perspectives on Industrial Restructuring and Training.* Blackwell, Oxford, 1990.

Reed, M. *The Sociology of Management.* Harvester Wheatsheaf, Hemel Hempstead, 1989.

Robb, M. Change for the better? Recent Developments in Adult Literacy. *Adults Learning,* Vol 4, No. 2, October 1992.

Roberts, C., Davies, E. & Jupp, T. *Language & Discrimination.* Longman, London, 1992.

Sayers, P. Making It Work! Communication Skills Training at a Black Housing Association, in *Critical Language Awareness pp 93-116*, Fairclough, N. (ed), Longman, 1992.

Scottish Community Education Council. *Workplace Education: Tapping Your Greatest Asset in the 1990s. A handbook on education in the workplace.* SCEC, Edinburgh, 1990.

Simon, B. (ed.). *The Search for Enlightenment: The Working Class and Adult Education in the Twentieth Century.* NIACE, Leicester, 1992.

Society of Industrial Tutors, & Transport & General Workers Union. *The Impossible Dream? The future of paid educational leave in Britain.* SIT & T&G, 1988.

Stein, S.G. *Workplace Literacy & the Transformation of the American Workplace: a model for effective practice.* Massachussetts, 1991.

Stephens, W.B. *Education, Literacy and Society 1830-1870: the geography of diversity in provincial England.* Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1987.

Suzuki, Y. *Japanese Management Structures, 1920-80.* MacMillan, Basingstoke & London, 1991.

T&GWU (Transport & General Workers Union). *Negotiating Training At the Workplace (*pack*).* T&GWU, London, 1991.

Taylor, M. et al (eds). *Basic Skills for the Workplace.* Culture Concepts Inc, Toronto, Canada, 1991.

Terkel, S. *Working.* Avon, New York, 1975.

Thompson, P. & McHugh, D. *Work Organisation: a critical introduction.* MacMillan, Basingstoke & London, 1990.

Thorpe, M., Edwards, R. & Hanson, A. *Culture & Processes of Adult Learning.* Routledge, London, 1992.

Tight, M. (ed). *Education for Adults. Volume II: Educational Opportunities for Adults.* Croom Helm, London, 1983.

Trades Union Congress. *Skills 2000.* TUC, London, 1989.

Training Agency (a) *Training in Britain: a study of funding, activity and attitudes.* The Main Report. HMSO, London, 1989

Training Agency (b) *Training in Britain: a study of funding, activity and attitudes.* A set of research reports:
*Training In Britain: Employers' Activities.* Deloitte Haskins & Sells/IFF Research Ltd
*Training In Britain: Employers' Perspectives on Human Resources.* Professor Pettigrew et al/Coopers & Lybrand
*Training In Britain: Market Perspectives.* Training Agency/IMS/Research Surveys of Great Britain et al.
*Training In Britain: Individuals Perspectives.* Rigg, M
HMSO, London, 1989.

Tuckett, A. *Towards a Learning Workforce: A Policy Discussion Paper on Adult Learners at Work.* NIACE, Leicester, 1991.

Tylecote, M. *The Mechanics' Institutes of Lancashire and Yorkshire before 1851.* Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1957.

Unemployment Unit. *Working Brief*, Issue 41, January 1993.

Unemployment Unit. *Working Brief*, Issue 43, April 1993.

US Dept of Education. *Workplace Literacy: Reshaping the American Workforce*. Office of Vocational & Adult Education, Division of Adult Education & Literacy, Washington DC, 1992.

Webb, R.K. *British working class reader, 1790-1848; literacy and social tension*, Allen & Unwin, London, 1955. Reprinted Kelley, New York, 1971.

Wimbush, E. & Talbot, M. (eds.) Mothers Meeting. In *Relative Freedoms: Women and Leisure*. Open University Press, Milton Keynes, 1988.

Wood, S. (ed.). *The Transformation of Work: skill, flexibility and the labour market*. Unwin Hyman Ltd, London, 1989.

Woodhall, M. *The Scope and Costs of the Educational Training of Adults in Britain*, ACACE, Leicester, 1980.

# Annexes

**Annex 1: National Education Training Targets**

**Foundation Learning**

1. By 1997, 80% of young people to reach NVQ [National Vocational Qualification] level 2 (or equivalent).

2. Training and education to NVQ3 (or equivalent) to be available to all young people who can benefit.

3. By 2000, 50% of young people to reach NVQ3 (or equivalent).

4. Education and training provision to develop self-reliance, flexibility and breadth.

**Lifetime Learning**

1. By 1996, all employees should take part in training or development activities.

2. By 1996, 50% of the workforce to be aiming for NVQs or units towards them.

3. By 2000, 50% of the work-force to be qualified to at least NVQ3 (or equivalent).

4. By 1996, 50% of medium to larger organisations (200 or more employees) to be "Investors in People".

*Source: NCVQ: National Vocational Qualifications: The Hallmark of Quality Training (booklet), NCVQ, London, 1993*

**Annex 2: Case Studies: Schedule of Interviews, Visits and Documentation consulted**

(Numbers in brackets below denote number of respondents involved in each interview, series of questionnaires, etc)

**1. RICHARDS & APPLEBY**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Management** | |
| Interviews | 9/4/91 |
| | 25/4/91 |
| | 18/6/91 |
| **Personnel** | |
| Interviews | 13/3/91 |
| | 25/4/91 |
| | 11/3/92 |
| Seminar presentations | Jan 92 (Woodlands, Chorley) |
| | June 92 (A.L.A.W., Baxi Heating) |
| **Shop Stewards (USDAW)** | |
| Interview(2) | 25/4/91 |
| **Students** | |
| Interview(2) | 25/4/91 |
| Group Discussion (8) | 10/6/91 |
| Questionnaires(16) | 7/91 |
| "Not Just A Number" (the booklet):article | 4/92 |
| **Acting Supervisor** | |
| Interview | 18/6/91 |
| **College** | |
| Ongoing contact with Project Worker | Jan 91 - Dec 92 |
| Group discussion with tutors(8) | 23/5/91 |
| Interview with tutors(2) | 6/6/91 |
| **General** | |
| Attended ALBSU project advisory group meeting | 22/5/91 |
| Attended Steering Group: | Mar 91 |

**Documentation**

Skelmersdale College: A Submission for a Local Development Project, Lancashire County LEA, Division of Non-Traditional Learning, Skelmersdale, 1990

Skelmersdale College ALBSU Project. Training At Work. A report on the training needs of Production, Stores and Warehousing Staff at Richards & Appleby, East Gillibrands, Skelmersdale. Skelmersdale, December 1990

Various meeting notes, correspondence, internal memos, etc

## 2. BICC

| | |
|---|---|
| **Management** | |
| Interviews | 3/6/91 |
| **Personnel** | |
| Interviews | 26/3/91 |
| | 7/5/91 |
| | 24/6/91 |
| | 28/2/92 |
| | 18/3/92 |
| **Shop Stewards** | |
| Interview | 3/6/91 |
| | 18/3/92 |
| **Students** | |
| Interview(2) | 8/6/91 |
| | 8/6/91 |
| Questionnaires(7) | June 91 |
| **Mid Cheshire College** | |
| Interview, Head of ABE | 24/6/91 |
| Interview with tutors(2) | 19/6/91 |
| | 21/6/91 |
| Interview, Head of Mid Cheshire Training Services | 17/4/91 |
| Interview, County ABE Advisor | 12/7/91 |
| **Halton College** | |
| Interview, Head of ABE | 8/4/92 |

**General**

| | |
|---|---|
| Attended Steering Group | 7/5/91 |

**Documentation**

Various correspondence, internal memos

Workbase Training. A Report on the Training Needs of Hourly Paid Staff at BICC, March 1990

Cheshire LEA. Annual Report to ALBSU 1990-1991. Cheshire County Council, Chester, 1991.

Cheshire Further Education Department. FE Colleges - Scheme of Planning and Delegation. Cheshire County Council, Chester, 1990.

Mid-Cheshire College. LEA Development Fund Project - Wrok Based Activity at BICC (Project Manager Pauline Ruth), Northwich, April 1991

## 3. BAXI HEATING

**Management**

| | |
|---|---|
| Interviews | 26/6/91 |
| Seminar, Baxi | 11/92 |

**Personnel**

| | |
|---|---|
| Interviews | 10/4/91 |
| | 3/9/91 |
| | 4/92 |
| Seminar presentations | 6/92 & 11/92 |

**Shop Stewards**

| | |
|---|---|
| Interview | 7/2/92 |
| "Baxi Partner" articles | 8/3/92 |
| | Spring 92 |

**Students**

| | |
|---|---|
| Interview | 26/6/91 |
| | 27/6/91 |
| Group Discussion (8) | 27/6/91 |
| Seminar presentations | June 92 & Nov 92 |
| "Not Just A Number" (the book) articles | April 1992 |
| "Not Just A Number" (the video) interview | December 1992 |

**Workbase Training Consultant**: ongoing contact

**College**

| | |
|---|---|
| Interview with tutor | 27/3/91<br>7/6/91<br>April 92 |

**General**

| | |
|---|---|
| Attendance at Steering Committee | July 92<br>August 92<br>October 92<br>March 1993 |
| Attended opening of IT centre | April 1993 |

**General**

Internal documentation, company-college correspondence, publicity material etc

**Pre-1991**

Visits, interviews and sight of documentation prior to the research period, in connection with previous research (Frank, 1990).

**Annex 3: Aims and Objectives of Workbase Training Needs Analysis**

**AIM**

1 To carry out a communication skills audit to determine the skills (reading, writing, numeracy and spoken English) needed to perform jobs effectively, accurately and safely using observation, interviews and colelction of written materials.

**OBJECTIVES**

1.2 To interview employees to determine their need for communication skills in order to carry out their jobs effectively.

1.3 To identify both individual and corporate needs.

1.4 To examine the need for communication skills training in order to implement change in the company.

1.5 To examine the need for communication skills training as an integral component of vocational skills training.

1.6 To report on the findings uncovered through the training needs analysis.

1.7 To recommend training courses and procedures to meet the assessed needs.

*Source: Workbase: A Report on the Training Needs of Hourly Paid Staff at BICC, March 1990.*

**Annex 4: Employer Survey: Interview schedule**

Introduction: this is a survey of employers in the NW to find out what opportunities there are for basic training for non-managerial staff ... it will take about 20 minutes. Can I tape record it?

1. What main fields does your company work in?

2. What is your job title? and what are your main areas of responsibility?

3. How many employees do you have altogether?

4. Of those, how many are in non-managerial jobs and what kinds of work does that cover? (job titles / brief descriptions)

5. What reading / writing / numeracy tasks are there in unskilled / semi-skilled jobs?

6. Have these changed over the past 5 years? How? (or do you see changes coming over the next few years, [prompts])

7. Do you test for literacy /numeracy ability at interview? - with a written application form or another kind of test?

8. What training do you offer currently at supervisory and manual level? (NVQs? - other qualifications?)

9. Do you ever receive requests for sponsorship for other kinds of training?

    Type
    Percentage supervisory / manual
    Response by Company

10. Do you see a need for basic skills training within the company?

11. Would this kind of training fit in with current training philosophy / structure - and how?

12. Is there a need in your company for training in English as a second language?

13. If yes, how is this need dealt with?

14. What benefits might there be in basic education training / ESL training? / to whom?

15. Do you see any problems or disadvantages associated with this kind of training?

16. Who do you feel should bear the cost of this kind of training?

17. Are you aware of any other such schemes in existence (locally or further afield?) - if so what?

18. Would you be interested in hearing about other companies' experiences with these schemes? (we plan to hold some seminars next year to link interested companies with those already running such schemes - would you be interested in receiving details?)

19. Do you have any other comments?

Would you be prepared at a later stage to answer any further questions on this topic?

Thank you very much for your time.

**REFUSALS**

20a. What reading and writing tasks are involved in the unskilled / semi-skilled jobs in your company.

20b. Do you feel that the people in those jobs would benefit from training in basic skills like maths, English, communication skills?
[prompts - eg. with more time, money available]

**Summary Sheet**

(To fill in at the end of interviews giving brief details of main points).

Date

Employer

Name of person interviewed

Interviewed by

LANCASTER
UNIVERSITY
Centre for the Study of
Education and Training

Dear

CSET, the Centre For The Study Of Education And Training at Lancaster University, is conducting a study of North West employers to find out:

* If employers feel there is a need for improved levels of basic skills (Maths, English, Communication Skills) among their workers

* Whether reading, writing and Maths demands on workers have increased for any reason over the last few years

* Who employers feel should be responsible for paying for training in this area

* What benefits and problems employers feel would be associated with this kind of training

We are contacting companies of different sizes to get an overview of the situation throughout the North West and would be interested in your thoughts on this issue even if you don't feel it is of direct relevance to your company at this stage.

The interview, which we are conducting by telephone, takes between fifteen and thirty minutes. We hope to phone you during the next two weeks either to interview you straight away or to arrange a more convenient time for us to phone back.

Please do not hesitate to telephone me on 0524 65201 x 2901 if you have any questions, otherwise I hope to be speaking to you soon. Thank you very much.

Yours sincerely

Fiona Frank
Research Associate
Adult Learning At Work

Lancaster University
Lancaster LA1 4YL
United Kingdom

Telephone (0524) 65201
Extension 2864 / 2860
Fax (0524) 844788
Telex 65111 Lancul G



Dr Murray Saunders
Director

**Annex 6. Employer Survey: Questionnaire**

**ADULT LEARNING AT WORK**

**EMPLOYER SURVEY**

*PLEASE READ THIS BEFORE ANSWERING ANY QUESTIONS*

This is a survey of employers in the North West to find out what opportunities there are and what need there is for training in basic skills such as English, Mathematics, Metrication and communication skills for non-managerial staff. It is part of a research project based at CSET, Lancaster University, funded by the Leverhulme Trust.

It will take you approximately 10 minutes to complete and we would be most grateful if you could take this time to help us. Most questions can be answered by ticking 'yes' or 'no' or by a simple one-word answer, but there is space to insert additional information where appropriate.

This questionnaire is confidential and the only people who will see your answers will be the small number of people who process the information at Lancaster University. Neither you nor your company will be identified in any reports or publications.

If you feel you don't have time to complete this questionnaire, we would be very grateful if you could turn to the back page and answer the 2 questions there.

**When you have completed the questionnaire please return it to me in the pre-paid envelope provided.**

Thank you very much for your help. If you need any further information, please telephone me, or Angela Leach (Project Administrator) on 0524 592679

Fiona Frank
Research Associate

FIONA FRANK, Research Associate
'ADULT LEARNING AT WORK' Project
Centre for the Study of Education and Training
UNIVERSITY OF LANCASTER
LANCASTER LA1 4YL
Tel: 0524 59-2679
Fax: 0524 844788

## SECTION ONE

1. What are the main business activities of your company?

2. Your position in the company: are you

| | |
|---|---|
| Managing Director | Training Manager |
| Personnel/ H.R.Manager | Other (please specify) |
| Factory Manager | |

_____

3. What are your main areas of responsibility as far as training goes?

4. How many employees do you have altogether?

| | |
|---|---|
| A: over 500 | D: 50-99 |
| B: 250-499 | E: 20-49 |
| C: 100-249 | F: under 20 |

5. Of those, approximately how many are in non-managerial jobs?

6. Please list the largest 2 or 3 types of unskilled and semi-skilled jobs (e.g. labourers, fitters, assemblers etc).

7. For the jobs listed above, what reading/writing/maths tasks are there in these jobs? (see the example in the top section)

| Job title | Reading<br>Maths | Writing |
|---|---|---|
| *Electric fitter* | *Read + understand*<br>*Cut cable to*<br>*electrical*<br>*specified*<br>*drawing*<br>*lengths* | *Complete*<br>*documentation on*<br>*each job* |
| 1. | | |
| 2. | | |
| 3. | | |

8. Have these tasks changed over the last few years? Yes No

8a If yes, how and why have they changed?

8b If no, do you anticipate any changes coming shortly? Yes No

8c If yes, what changes do you anticipate and why?

| |
|---|
| |

9. Do you use any of the following ways to select applicants to the jobs you have listed above?

| | Always | Sometimes | Never |
|---|---|---|---|
| Application Form | | | |
| Interview | | | |
| Written Test | | | |
| Practical Test | | | |

10. Do you offer training for your semi-skilled/unskilled employees?

Yes No (If No, please go on to Q. 12)

Please give brief details

| |
|---|
| |

10a Does your training lead to any qualifications such as NVQs?

Yes No

11 Do you involve the Trades Unions in your training (either by direct consultation or by informing them of training programmes)

Yes No

Please give brief details

| |
|---|
| |

12 Do you ever receive requests from employees for sponsorship for other kinds of training (such as evening classes)?

Yes No Occasionally

13 Would your company react positively to such a request?

Yes No Perhaps

13a If your answer is 'Perhaps', please give brief details of the criteria you would use to make the decision (eg. if work-related, if funds allowed).

| |
|---|
| |

14 Is there a need in your company for training in English as a second language?

Yes No

14a If 'yes', how is this need dealt with?

| |
|---|
| |

15 Do you see a need for training in basic skills such as Maths, English, Metrication and communication skills within the company?

Yes No

16. Do you provide, or have you provided, training in any of these areas?

Yes No

Please give details

| |
|---|
| |

17. What do you feel would be the benefits of providing basic skills training at the workplace?

18. What disadvantages do you see associated with providing workplace basic skills training?

**SECTION TWO**

1. Who do you feel should bear the cost of basic education for people in employment?

2. Are you aware of any companies who have in-house basic education schemes running?

Yes No

3 If 'yes', please give brief details.

4 Would you be interested in hearing about other companies' experiences of these schemes? (We are holding seminars to link interested companies with those already running such schemes, and producing a brief report with case studies of other companies' experiences).

Yes No

5 Would you be prepared to answer any further questions on this topic?

Yes No

If you have answered Yes to Question 4 or 5 in this section, please fill in your details below.

Name _____

Position _____

Company name _____

Address _____

Tel: _____

Fax: _____

Thank you very much for your time

**Please now return the questionnaire in the pre-paid envelope provided**

**REFUSALS**

1. What reading, writing and maths tasks are involved in the unskilled/semi-skilled jobs in your company?

| |
|---|
| |

2. Do you feel that the people in those jobs would benefit from training in basic skills like Maths, English, communication skills?

Yes No